

AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

NOV. 1921
20 CENTS

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Henry C. Rowland
Sophie K.
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November
1921

AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. XLVIII
No. 3

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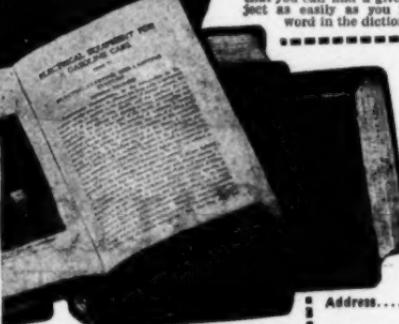
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AINSLEE'S

VOL. XLVIII.

NOVEMBER, 1921.

No. 3.



Salvage Claims

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "Filling His Own Shoes,"
"Doing Good," etc.

CHAPTER I.

In going South to the great winter resort John Paul was merely following the line of least resistance. If half a dozen doctors had examined him in half a dozen days, not in consultation, but each one making his own diagnosis, there would have been half a dozen opinions on his case, and like Kipling's "Tribal Lays," each one would probably have been right.

Nothing of this sort had happened to John Paul, first because he was himself enough of a scientist to feel that it was scarcely worth while making a bad job worse by trying to follow orthodox lines of treatment for his relief. He knew that his trouble was about the worst which could happen to a man, which is nervous collapse; with no taint of actual insanity to give it either excuse or something to use as a handle. He could not plead shell shock because his service in the war, while severe, had been in the nature of a physical athletic event and should have left him, by all rights, more fit than worse for the experience, as it should any good fighting man.

Through no distinct wrongdoing John Paul had found himself, his name, and his personality the joke of the nation through its press. He might have changed his name and gone to

some other country, but to do so would have been the admission of a shame and disgrace which he felt to be undeserved.

Nor was there any especial stigma to be feared or criminal procedure, or even just cause for society's grin. But his exposure had been so sweeping, so ridiculous, so devoid of any heroic gesture which might relieve it, that he felt himself to be standing bare upon a bleak place exposed to a gusty gale of cruel mirth.

So for the present he desired merely to live on as decently as possible and let the circumstance spend itself. Being possessed of sufficient means, with a future prospect of greater ones, he decided to go where he might be at least as comfortable physically as possible until he was able to gather himself together sufficiently to show the world that he was not the fool it thought him. He felt that he could not now grapple with such abysmal silliness so widely disseminated, for the world has a silly, senseless way of judging a man from the standpoint of its press publicity. He doubted even that it was worth while to grapple with it as dealt him by individuals, his friends, and family and the casual man upon the street.

Then, arriving at the great hotel, he

found, not to his surprise, that his notoriety had preceded him. The clerk smiled upon glancing at his name, John Paul Jones, on the register. There was no lack of politeness or consideration in his reception—merely grins, as if all surrounding human nature wore a grin for him. He felt that if he should pick up a stray dog on the street, it would loll its tongue and survey him with canine ridicule.

Previous to his going South he had not slept very much. Sitting on a window seat, many stories up, in the great hotel, he had looked out upon the twinkling lights of the darkening city and felt them to be mean, glinting, little eyes from great couchant monsters which could find nothing better to do than amuse themselves with his derision. The noises of traffic came up to him in shrill giggles, or hoarse bellows and blabs of discordant mirth, and when the day came it appeared to survey him with that bland, contemptuous disregard of suffering which great, strong, busy creatures might feel for squirming, suffering insects grounded in the mire of their tread.

From this it may be seen that John Paul was actually in a pretty desperate way, principally because this thing had preyed upon his mind until its peace was totally disrupted. And he had sense enough to see the impossibility of fighting it back, so there was nothing for him to do except grin back and, being no buffoon, his grin was unconvincing even to himself.

Just what might have developed from such reactions as these, too long continued, one can hardly say. A man can come to some sort of understanding with his conscience, and if he be a criminal, he has at least the focal point of eluding pursuit. A great many men will say, with more or less arrogance, that their regard for public opinion is nil, and this may be true in respect to some particular quality of esteem for

which they feel contempt. But no one person can face the blatant ridicule of a whole great country's press, especially if he be one of the elect, which is to say one of birth and breeding and honorable record, and with that fastidiousness which is the birthright of any well-bred animal, whether he be a human or a hound or hunter, or even a lion.

The erosion of this stigma was etching into John Paul pretty deeply when, at the end of his first week at the place, a big woman in a bathing suit, generally voluptuous of build, but with steady, gray eyes under rather overhanging brows, her cheek bones strongly pronounced, gave him a level look as she was walking down into the water. There was something curious about this look, and it was directed toward him in response to a titter and some fugitive words which had reached her ear in passing a group of young men and girls, all more or less unclad.

"I'm going to introduce myself," said she, "but not right away. I think I know something that might do you some good."

John Paul got up wearily.

"I don't believe you," said he, "but all the same, at this day and hour we're living in, it's so extraordinary to receive a proffer of friendship or even common courtesy that it makes one feel as if there must be some wonderful accident. I ought to warn you, though, that I'm the national joke."

She rested one hand on her wide hip and looked at him with a quizzical smile.

"Well, it's some distinction to be a national anything," said she. "A cartoon in a Sunday supplement is usually the first thing a newspaper reader turns to, especially if he's a man. Besides, there's another thing to remember—that a disgrace or any sort of undesired publicity would cost you about

a million dollars, to make lasting even for a week. You didn't do anything bad, anyhow."

"That's just the trouble," said John Paul.

She turned away with a sort of casual beckoning, and it struck him as strange that he could be talking and looking at such a superb creature with so little masculine emotion. She was older than he, John Paul thought, by five or six years perhaps, and yet there was a sort of agelessness about her which goes less with the human species than with certain of the lower animals, like deer or panthers, which are apt to be splendidly strong and supple almost up to the moment of their allotted span of years and which, unlike humans, have not imposed upon them the necessity of passing through years of juvenility which gives way with startling abruptness to another long span of senile decay. He had the peculiar feeling that this woman, who had seen fit to speak to him for some reason best known to herself, must have been a beautiful, full-powered creature from about the age of fourteen, and that she would keep on being one until the curse few rang for her to quench her fires at advanced age.

He followed her down to the water's edge and waded out after her, wondering a little if she were real and if she might not swim straight out until the brine took her and him into a sort of elemental solution and hoping a little bit that it would. Then, as they swam onward he noticed for the first time a yacht, a full-powered house boat of luxurious appointments, toward which his new friend was heading in an objective way.

It flashed, then, across John Paul's mind that while lunching on the terrace the previous day he had overheard, from a table adjoining, some comment on this yacht and that this comment was not flattering. But the half-flip-

pant, half-contemptuous references, which some months before would have stirred him to a sort of militant concern, had left him cold, made no permanent impression on his mind. He did not think that anything could ever affect him again or stir a fever in his blood any more than might the blood of a patient convalescing from yellow fever or cholera be rendered febrile by the proximity of a fresh case of either disease.

Swimming easily through the pellicid brine of a temperature and quality which seemed not only to rinse through his system with sweetening, purifying cleanliness, but to exercise upon it an exquisite massage, he found himself presently, and for the first time in many months, quietly amused. There was a quality so singular to this adventure, if such it promised, and addressed to himself of all persons! It was as if a battered prophet were being soothed wholesomely by the ministrations of a siren. Yet there had been no mockery or hint of malice in her casual, kindly, and scarcely-more-than-tacit invitation. He was convinced that she must know all about him, but to make sure of this, as they swam easily seaward, side by side, he asked:

"I suppose, of course, you know who I am."

Her slight, answering smile showed a strong row of even teeth, and something in the greenish-gray eyes and slightly retroussé nose, with its delicately formed nostrils, suggested the full-bodied mermaids with which certain ancient marine artists were wont to decorate their impossible seas—less artistically, perhaps, for the delectation of strong sailor men—and which were sometimes to be found inscribed on early charts with galleasses and spouting dolphins.

"That's the reason I asked you to come out aboard and have a little chat, and drink a cup of tea."

"Out aboard?" he asked. "Like this?"

"Why, yes," she answered. "I fancy you've rather got over most of your ideas."

John Paul gave a short laugh.

"You're right," he answered. "I have."

They swam on, then, in silence and came presently alongside the accommodation ladder of the house boat. John Paul's guide swung herself up strongly and with calm indifference to her swimming suit, which might have served in these days for a young girl of athletic habit, but seemed outrageous as a public costume for such a maturity of womanhood.

John Paul followed, curious to learn what it was all about while yet indifferent to the answer. The spring sunshine of the tropic latitude beat down with the mellow richness of some soft, sensuous world where the rigors of climate are not to be regarded. Nobody was in evidence aboard the house boat, and John Paul's guide led him to the awninged upper deck, where she seated herself indifferently in a wicker chair and motioned him to take another. Then, without making any comment she regarded him for a moment, thoughtfully, from under her full brows, reached for a cigarette, lighted it, and thrust the box across the table to him.

"Now why," said John Paul, "have you extended this kindly hospitality? Just to rub the business in a little more?"

"Why, no," she answered. "That would be scarcely possible, would it? I'm rather a kind-hearted woman and I felt sorry for you. If I found a castaway on the beach of a desert island, I'd offer what I had in the way of helping his material needs, and I had a feeling that you were a castaway of sorts, but a mental one."

"It cuts deeper than that," said John

Paul. "I'm a castaway to the depths of all previous ethics and ambitions and principles and illusions—whatever goes to make up the consciousness of one's personality."

"How did you happen to let yourself in for such a hopeless experiment?" she asked.

"Because I didn't consider it hopeless. It seemed to me to be the big idea. I had no end of backing socially and financially, and I had a conviction that the thing ought to be tried by somebody and that it might as well be me. I suppose that my conception of it was a good deal the same as that of the late kaiser for world's supremacy or Bryan for prohibition or Wilson for the League of Nations."

She nodded.

"I thought it must be something of that sort. And what was the chief reason for its falling down?"

"Because I wasn't a big enough man, nor did I have sense enough to see, until too late, that the whole business was being craftily exploited to make a fool of and smash a tremendously potential political reformer—not myself, but my uncle."

She nodded.

"Something like the dove-of-peace fiasco."

"Yes, but worse by about a million times," John Paul admitted bitterly. "Worse, because it was on a so much larger scale. I had always been a purist since college days, and settlement worker and would-be redeemer of mistaken women and prison reformer and all that sort of thing, and besides my own considerable fortune, my uncle had given me unlimited backing. Perhaps he had his reasons for it, too, held back from me, as I was always the figurehead, the superintendent and publicity agent and all that sort of thing, while Uncle Amos sat back and watched to see how it was going to work out. By the way, would you

mind telling me by whom I have the honor of being entertained?"

"I am Mrs. Evelyn Ord."

"Of course," said John Paul. "I should have known, but somehow I thought you were much older, and if you don't mind my saying so, much less attractive."

She gave a little nod.

"I owe you a good deal for unpaid publicity," said she. "I must admit that no critic or minister of the gospel from his pulpit or even fellow crafts-woman ever handled my novels quite as roughly, or perhaps ferociously would be the better word, as you." She smiled. "You see, John Paul, you went at me with such a flaming ardor of youth."

John Paul looked at her steadily.

"Then this, I take it," said he, "is in the nature of revenge."

"Not a bit of it," she answered promptly. "No more revenge than when two conspicuous public people of ideas diametrically opposed, but natures having a certain depth and breadth may clash, and one of them come a cropper. I merely thought it might amuse us both to talk over the battle while our wounds are convalescing."

"That," said John Paul, "is an inept simile. I can't see any scars on you, and I am not yet convalescent. In fact, I doubt that I ever shall be."

"Oh, yes, you will!" she answered. "You are young and strong and your shoulders are broad, and human beings are rather like the bandar log. They chatter and grin and throw down sticks and nuts and then dash off and forget all about it." She considered him thoughtfully for a moment. "I admit, though, that it must have been pretty awful while it lasted."

"Awful is scarcely the word, Mrs. Ord. You see, we established this big colony as a sort of nucleus, and collected, with no end of argument and propaganda and unlimited expense, so

many whom I thought to be sincere, and I selected our crowd with a view to its—what shall I say?—attractiveness. No doddering, senile, whiskered ranters or catty old women or crazed, fanatical, lantern-jawed youths, but bright, young, attractive people. Then, when the colony was going strong for the induction of decency and clean living and inculcation of so many old-fashioned ideas of modesty and propriety, and we were organizing, as you might say, missionaries to send to other fields and State legislatures, I began for the first time to get some inkling of what was really going on."

"And then," said Mrs. Ord, "the bombshell burst and you were hoisted on the petard of your very own publicity."

John Paul's face whitened, and there came an expression about his mouth and eyes which doctors dread to see on the faces of their nerve patients.

"It was so terrible," said he, "that even now, numbed as I am to some extent, I can scarcely get hold of it. The profligacy of this transcendental colony of mine appears to have been something which would need a French or Russian writer to describe. Then, once the exposure was sprung, it was like the breaking of the Croton dam. I was not even the archhypocrite, which would have been bad enough, but the archfool. I doubt if there was a single town or city in which I was not cartooned with the tin halo and the wings and all that sort of thing. More than that, some few of us might have been sent to jail for the rest of our lives if it hadn't been that the whole business was so sublimely ridiculous that the authorities overlooked the Mann law in the gust of horse laughter which went over the country. Besides that, every one saw that it was just a great, big, carefully handled plot on the part of his political enemies to kill forever the hopes of my uncle for any national

office or honors, and they held him to be a very dangerous man."

"How did your uncle take it?"

"Like the grim old philosopher he is. Besides, his business sense helped him through. When I went to see him, nearly insane, he snapped his jaws together like an old turtle and said, 'Well, you may be able to stop gambling and drinking and licensed prostitution, but when you tackle the oldest form of misbehavior in the world, you are up against too many private backers of it to get more than a kick and a grin, so let's take our medicine and work the advertising for what it's worth.'"

"Good logic from his point of view, but not from yours," said Mrs. Ord, and added, "unless you expect to inherit some day."

"Oh, that's apt to happen, I suppose," said John Paul indifferently, "because Uncle Amos is a family-first sort of man! But it doesn't matter much to me as I have all I'm ever apt to need, and would probably have merely the trouble of giving it away." He stopped speaking suddenly and stared at her appalled. Something in the sanity, the cool voice, the perfect calm and poise of the woman to whom he was talking brought back one of his strongest instincts, which was that of a well-ordered conventionality. He saw the absurd incongruity of their positions. Here he was, sitting upon the spacious upper deck of a very modern, well-appointed, cruising house boat. All about were those evidences of a scrupulous housekeeping and management by virtue of which every article seems in its place of its own accord as though responding to the order of some unseen agency with the discipline become automatic from excellency of management. There was not even a sound from below which might indicate a steward about his duties or waiting for a call.

And the most distracting thing about

it was that here was he, John Paul, who had focused his life's best efforts for the suppression of that of which his hostess was the exponent, talking to her with the first tranquillity of soul which he had experienced since the upheaval of his whole mental system and order of thought. He, John Paul, a young man fastidious always to the last degree, the enemy of mixed bathing, who had always regarded even his own plunge in the very ocean a good deal as he had regarded his plunge in his tub, sitting there half naked and wholly unashamed and discussing the most important things that life had ever held for him with a charming woman similarly unclad.

It did not flash across his mind that such a situation might have obtained through hazards of catastrophe, shipwreck, or earthquake, or the like. Neither did it occur to him that he might be the marionette of a self-willed woman possessed of a personality which enabled her to disregard all orthodoxy and established conventions.

No explanation flashed through John Paul's mind for the simple reason that this gangliaed organ was numbed beyond the possibility of flashing.

But what forced itself most upon him was the contrast between their inherent points of view and the reposeful ease in which these were now being discussed, the first restful conversation which he could remember to have indulged in since the collapse of his high endeavor. Hitherto there had always been a sense of antagonism even in discussions with persons who avowedly were allied with his cause. These mostly had been conducted in drawing rooms or studies of palatial homes, with a certain studied ceremony and an immaculate observance of good form. And yet, these conversations had been held invariably under the burden of self-consciousness on both sides and the consideration of diction and

phraseology and the unmistakable hostility of those who seek less to express than to impress. Yet here, now, he was talking over the affair with a woman whose writings had been to him an abomination and against whose works he had railed with an invective compared to which it seemed to him that Cicero's invective of Cataline would be an extenuation. And he felt himself to be so entirely at ease. There was in him the conviction that her kindness was neither a *bew gestic* nor the result of curiosity nor malice. And they were in their bathing suits, dripping ones at that, with little puddles of water forming under their feet and trickling away with the pitch of the deck. If also she might not have been given a unanimous verdict by sculptors as a woman of perfect physical beauty, there was that about her which was infinitely satisfying, such as one finds in a type depicted to ennoble the physical countenance of any epic idea of which the symbol is femininity.

As John Paul gradually was drawn under the influence of this impression there came a noisy interruption. The pretty house boat, this latter not in the English sense, but in the American one of a full-powered seagoing vessel, appeared about to be boarded by a band of sirens. There were cries and splashings alongside, and flashing arms and heads coifed with flaming kerchiefs, and a trim, mahogany launch which appeared to be convoying these mermaids under the direction of a blond Swede quartermaster, and in the stern a Japanese with a consignment of stores.

"Here come my guests," said Mrs. Ord. "I've got a trio of pretty girls which are precisely the sort you've launched your crusade against—in, I should say at a pinch, all respects."

John Paul made a gesture of indifference.

"They are the victors," said he. "My crusade has gone to pieces, so that, I suppose, to judge by all historic precedent, it must have been based on a wrong idea."

His hostess leaned forward.

"It was," said she earnestly. "Any idea based on the coercion of mass morality is wrong. Because you see, John Paul, mass morality is not wrong. If it were, the world would go to smash, or rather it would have gone to smash ages and ages ago."

John Paul shook his head.

"I don't agree with you," said he, "but as a flattened proselyte, I am not in the position to dispute you."

"Then why not have a real uncensored look at real uncensored people? Come out and be my guest for a few days, or if you don't feel up to that just yet, keep your quarters at the hotel and come out and play around with us. Start to-night for dinner, eight."

John Paul rose.

"In my bathing suit?" he asked.

"No, in flannels. We change the uniform at sundown. Would you like to be set ashore in the launch or would you rather swim?"

"I'll swim, thanks," said John Paul. "I'm just beginning to feel as if I'd grown some arms and legs."

CHAPTER II.

When, two hours later, John Paul crossed the terrace on his way to the landing, he was conscious of a curious change of attitude toward surrounding people and things which, conversely, seemed to have wrought an even greater change in him.

Up to the time of his talk with Mrs. Ord he had passed through several phases—overwhelming horror, crushing shame, a frantic, impotent desire in some way to justify himself, and finally, a sort of cold, indifferent aloof-

ness, turning a face of Oriental impassivity to such friends and acquaintances as he happened to meet.

But John Paul was now conscious of a sense of restored location, or, more properly, a new, strange, but definite location which seemed, in the slang of the day, to have "got him somewhere." He was going over deliberately to the camp of the enemy. It is better to be a prisoner than an outcast. It was as if the soldier of some lost cause, who had been disarmed, then told to clear out, and left to wander about no-man's land, had been taken over by the enemy host. Perhaps the best of the business for John Paul lay in the fact that whereas he had suffered passively, he was now doing something active. He knew that his performance in becoming a guest and friend of Mrs. Ord would bring a storm of fresh, ironic ridicule, and he was rather glad of it, because, at least, he was acting with his eyes open where previously he had been a myopic dupe.

A harbinger of this was almost immediately presented to him, for, on his way down to the landing, he fell in with an acquaintance with whom he had already exchanged words at the resort. This was a man named DeLancey Fisher, known generally as a clubman and sort of little brother to the rich, but whom John Paul, in his publicity campaign, had discovered to be a sort of keyhole listener and boudoir spy in the pay of a society publication, and he smiled a little grimly when Fisher asked him casually how he was managing to amuse himself.

"Not badly," John Paul answered. "I'm just off to dine aboard the *Lotus* with Mrs. Ord."

"My word!" gasped Fisher. "Then it was you, after all, I saw swimming out with the seductive Evelyn."

"Why, yes," John Paul answered; "she's taken me under her wing, in a manner of speaking."

"Well," Fisher answered, "I'll say it's some wing, but really, old chap, do you happen to know just the sort of crowd you're getting into?"

John Paul raised his eyebrows.

"Do any of us ever know that?" he asked. "You might mention, if it interests you, Fisher, that having found no great amount of good in uplift work, I purpose to enjoy myself a little if I can manage it."

Fisher looked at him reflectively.

"Well," said he, "I don't know but that you're right. Whatever else may or may not have been said of Evelyn Ord and her books, I've never heard her charged with any lack of courage in her broad convictions, and more wounded soldiers were cheered up in hospitals by reading her books than ever were by reading tracts. If you happen to be feeling sore from being made——" he paused.

"National fool?" asked John Paul smoothly. "Well, I don't any longer, and I think it will be amusing to look over the other side of the trenches." And, with a brief nod, he passed on and got into the glittering launch and was carried swiftly out aboard the house boat.

It was a very different, detached segment of human activity. A gramophone was spraying the still air with dance music and on the spacious upper deck bright figures were weaving and coalescing like the chips of colored glass in a kaleidoscope. An Oriental steward went skimming past the rail with a tray from which came the flash of crystal. Two little Pekingese began to yap a welcome at the launch. Evelyn Ord gave John Paul a friendly little wave from the upper deck, then met him at the head of the companionway. She looked more slender in her evening gown, also a little older.

"You've sloughed off some of your despond already, John Paul," said she

approvingly, and tapped him on the arm. "Your face is not so drawn."

"You did me good," he answered. "I was thirsty for a little of the milk of human kindness."

"Well, I've got the reputation for being a good provider in that respect," she answered and glanced over her round, bare shoulder. The music stopped abruptly. "Come here, girls," she called, "and get acquainted with the vanquished enemy to mirth."

Three prettily gowned young women came smilingly to greet John Paul. His immediate impression of them was not important because they happened to be of the type as myriad in America as parakeets in the jungle—bright, chattering, luxuriant, and gay. They inspected John Paul with a sort of bold but friendly curiosity.

"Were you really the enemy to mirth?" asked one of them, a dark, spectacular girl with violet eyes and a skin so fine that one could scarcely have felt its touch.

"From the amount of mirth of which I was the innocent cause," John Paul answered, "I should say that my sentiment toward it was hardly worth considering."

"And I should say," broke in another of these damsels, "that you had an awful lot of it coming to you."

"We three," a fair-haired girl informed him in a voice which suggested one of the chorus saying her few, treasured lines, "are the Laugh Sisters. Evelyn is the source of supply and we dispense it, like waitresses."

"I warn you, though, John Paul," said Mrs. Ord, "that this is not a free dispensary."

"Pay institutions are always best," said John Paul. "Just what is the current tender here, the medium of exchange, and what is its unit? I want to pay my shot."

"Well, I'll tell you, John Paul," said Mrs. Ord. "To make you feel at

home and simplify the situation to your tired mind, just consider everything about me and my crowd, habits, theories, behavior, point of view, to be all precisely opposite to what you've always advocated. Keeping that in mind and acting on it, you will never get in wrong."

"A big, bold order," said John Paul. "However, I'm on."

"You are to consider yourself as seeing the whole picture in the negative from what your former vision has been in the positive," said Mrs. Ord. "Think of it in this way. You have, in your charities and settlements and homes and asylums and things, taken many a poor, bruised butterfly and tried to bring her back to your idea of high morale by doctrines kind but rigid. Now you are to think of yourself from the reverse of the picture."

"A bit bewildering," said John Paul, "but I think I get you. In the present case I am the broken blossom, made brittle by the frost of virtue and with petals badly crumpled. Your effort is to be to restore me to a normal *joie de vivre* nearly destroyed from having been so damnable good."

"Beautifully expressed," said Mrs. Ord. "We want to warm you to life, by a sort of transfusion of what you have always considered wrong and forbidden. We do not consider anything to be wrong so long as it is kind and has the quality of beauty, nor anything forbidden which helps to make the world happier and to make people love to live in it."

"An absolutely ample and joyous pagan program," said John Paul. "I have the honor, herewith, to subscribe to the limit. Now where do we begin?"

"Well," said Mrs. Ord, glancing over her splendid shoulder at the steward, "I think we might as well begin with dinner."

If John Paul's Lucifer crash had not been so complete, so stunning, it is

likely that the daring tenets of this new cult might have appalled him. His frankly stated doctrine was of a sort which might have been taken as a declaration of independence of all established convention, and perhaps it was. But, he reflected as he sipped his cold, green-turtle soup, there were two jokers in the deck—a zero and double zero. The carte blanche had a rider, the gyroscope of unlimited indulgence, a stabilizer. This ample-natured high priestess had declaimed that all must be controlled by kindness and beauty.

Well, then, here were a lot of trumps thrown into the discard at the start. The conditions spiked the guns of long-range libertinage, put a taboo on wild and reckless pleasure, double crossed most of the cardinal sins. They cut out drunkenness, though not drink, cut out gambling to a point where ugly wounds of loss might be inflicted, while yet permitting gaming to a degree where nobody would be hurt. There could be in this religion no threat of damning anybody, with hell-fire or anything else. Love, while in no way barred, must be controlled by kindness and beauty.

Turning these things quickly in his mind while the girls chattered and sipped champagne, and Mrs. Ord injected the talk with flashes of wit and humor, it struck John Paul that here was a sort of Arcadian religion which might be pretty nearly perfect if honestly observed, and yet a religion at which the clergymen of all religions, and even most well-ordered laymen, would hold up their hands with horror. And as the evening wore on and he found himself for the first time in his strictly ordered life having a really joyful, jolly, social time, he was seized by a wonderful idea. What if it should be the amazing truth that his former theories had been all wrong and that the outrageous collapse of his own ambitious effort to enforce them might not

have been the very best thing that could have happened him?

The talk, especially that of the hostess, was like her books, of a frank and startling breadth which sometimes made him gasp. But it also made him laugh. He drank enough wine to take the raw edge off his nerves and give such a relish to his food as he had never felt before. Some other guests came over from the shore, members, apparently, of Mrs. Ord's wide-open cult, and they played some bridge for reasonable stakes. They danced. They shimmied, but prettily, as fairies might shimmer in a dance. John Paul felt that a flirtation would not have been repulsed, but, though excited by this strange and new experience, he still preserved a sort of automatic decorum.

And then at midnight, with a great, yellow, tropic moon hanging like a lantern overhead, a swimming party was proposed. And the moon looked down on a revel which some months before would have made John Paul sick with furious revolt and aroused in him such a militant Puritanism and burning fervor of fanatical religious protest, that, had the power been vested in him, he would have been capable of placing these revelers behind prison bars for months, inflicting other penalties rigorous and cruel.

Mrs. Ord drew him aside.

"What do you think of it all," she asked; "frankly and honestly?"

John Paul shook his head.

"I don't think I can tell you just yet," said he. "My paralyzed faculties were open to possession by any sort of new beliefs, but all this makes them groggy."

She nodded.

"I think I understand."

"Until to-night," said John Paul. "I had never drunk a drop of anything for pleasure or in a social way. I had never played for money, though that does not say much for me, as many of

my legitimate investments have been gambles. I had never sported about nor scarcely even looked at slightly clad girls. My dancing had been rather like a funeral rite, in a stiff and formal way, and a social duty I detested. I had scarcely ever heard a risqué story. The people I frequented never told them. The whole thing confuses me more than anything else."

"Do you like it?" asked Mrs. Ord.

"I can't even tell you that. I've had an awfully good time, but I doubt if this sort of thing could ever really appeal to me."

"How about permitting it for other people?"

"That's the toughest question yet, but I'll say this much, that I am convinced that it's no use to try to suppress it and that to do so might make things worse."

Her level gaze rested on him.

"Have you ever been in love?" she asked.

"No; not even in a stately, virtuous fashion."

"How in the world did you ever get that way?"

"I didn't get that way. I just always was that way. I was a good little boy, but husky and athletic, and when the other boys made fun of me I used to show them some pretty good scrapping. It seems to me that I've been scrapping all my life. I never knew any immediate family. My uncle brought me up, and he used to watch me curiously as if wondering always when I was going to break out. He approved my habits and trend of mind, but looking back I can see that it was not because he was a good man, but because he was a business man and he saw in me a safe successor and one not apt to throw away his money in foolish ways."

"And then," said Mrs. Ord, "you did."

"Well," said John Paul, "if it could have been done any more completely

and on any more magnificent scale of the sublimely ridiculous, I'd like to hear about it."

"What induced you to try such a thing?"

"Disappointment over the results of the war. I'd fought pretty hard and seen some fearful things and kept nerved up by telling myself that after all it was all going to be worth while and justified in teaching us thrift and honesty and cleanliness of life and all the best ideals of a purified humanity. And then what was the result? Insane extravagance, rampant thievery, rotteness of living, and a perfect tidal wave of debauchery and crime."

"Quite so," admitted Mrs. Ord cheerfully. "So you thought it up to you to start a nice little crusade of your own."

"That's about the size of it. And I got badly bumped, and now as I look around your happy, floating home I am not quite sure but that it was the best thing that could have happened me."

"I think so," said Mrs. Ord. "The next thing to happen to you will be that you will fall in love. I believe that in trying to humanize the country that big beast turned around and did it to yourself."

"That is a comforting way to look at it. It bucks up my self-respect to think that it needed the whole darned country to change my mind, and as for the falling in love—well, if you don't look out, you might find that your healing process has opened a deeper wound."

Mrs. Ord gave her quiet little laugh.

"It doesn't do a kiddie any harm to fall in love with his nurse, if she's a good woman."

CHAPTER III.

Fisher made it a point to fall in with John Paul the following day.

"Well, old chap," he asked, "did you enjoy your party?"

"Yes," answered John Paul, "I did. I suppose, Fisher, that you see coming to you quite a little fun and profit still out of my affairs."

"I don't know," said Fisher frankly. "To tell the truth, I am rather hesitating about whether or not to exploit them at all."

"Is that a delicate way of hinting that if I'd rather not, you might be induced to leave them alone?" John Paul asked.

"Oh, no!" said Fisher. "So far I've never gone in for blackmail, though it seems to be a paying business these days. But the point is, John Paul, that I think you've been ridden hard enough and that everybody else probably feels the same about it. When a man's public ridicule has been on so sweeping a scale, there's a general tendency to lay off him for good. About a quarter of a century ago a naval lieutenant did a daring, brilliant act, and then because a swarm of fool girls flocked up and kissed him, he was made the laughing-stock of the country. But once the laughter had died away they dropped him like a joke that everybody knows."

"Good press logic," John Paul admitted. "I got it worse and so I suppose it will be over sooner."

Fisher started to speak, then hesitated. John Paul noticed this pausing to consider and said:

"Let's have it, Fisher. I'm past being seriously offended now."

"Well, now," said Fisher slowly, "I hate to butt in, but I have still some decency left, though Heaven knows how it's lasted out. I think you've had about the rottenest deal of any man I ever knew, and I'd rather hate to see you get deeper in the bog. Now tell me, old chap, have you got any clear line on this crowd you've thrown in with?"

"Not very," said John Paul, "but really, Fisher, it doesn't matter in the least. Looking at it from the viewpoint

of personal feeling, it's worth a lot to a man who's been through what I have to get cheered up and taken away from himself, if only for a few hours. I'm quite ready and willing to stand the bill when presented."

Fisher seemed to turn this over in his mind, then asked:

"What sort of bill?"

"Any sort."

"That's a sporting proposition, but if you're thinking in terms of money, my boy, then I can tell you that none of that sort will be presented. Evelyn has scads and scads of it, and if you think that she might let you in for matrimony, then you're wrong again."

"Well, what then?" John Paul asked.

"I don't know that I can quite explain what I mean, but, to put it roughly, her bill might be something of this sort—the annexing of you, not as a lover or fetch-and-carrier or anything of that sort, but as a sort of domestic familiar, a man to be in evidence about her premises and give some sort of countenance to some of the raw stuff she pulls off."

"In other words," said John Paul, "a guide, counselor, and friend."

"Call it a friend," said Fisher. "She'll do the guiding and counseling herself."

"She's shown herself a good friend to me," said John Paul.

"Precisely. Because she knows darned well that you happen to be that particular sort of typical American of pure old stock that can never rest quite easy in his bed or grave until convinced that he's paid his shot, and then some. This squaring of what you might feel to be your debt is apt to take a form that might, later on, be terribly inconvenient, to say the least, especially if you happen to be married. You might be able to square it with yourself, but never in this good, green world could you square it with your exclusive set."

John Paul reflected for a moment. He had always rather despised Fisher

while tolerating him with a quasi-friendliness, just as a well-bred young American with the courage to engage himself in the municipal politics of his town might feel a guarded friendliness with some political power for whom he should, according to all principles and knowledge of the individual, feel nothing but abomination. But now, for the first time, there rose in John Paul's sentiment a liking for Fisher, no matter what he was.

"I get you, Fisher," said he. "The thing you're driving at, I take it, is that Mrs. Ord, with all her faults and virtues, might prove a jolly good woman to let alone."

"That's about the size of it," said Fisher. "I've said a little more than I really meant to, but you're a grown-up he-person and you can do as you like about it.

"Mind you, though," he added, as though with a sudden afterthought of caution, "I haven't knocked her."

"On the contrary," said John Paul, "it strikes me that you've been paying her a series of very high compliments."

"Well, that's one way of looking at it," Fisher admitted. "And not that I care a hang, but just to gratify an idle curiosity, hasn't it ever struck you that the sort of gumshoe rubberneck you think me to be might really hate to see a good man go all to smash?"

"No," said John Paul slowly, "I must admit that aspect of the case had never occurred to me at all."

"That's just the trouble with you proud fellows," Fisher complained. "It never seems to get through your highly educated domes that society reporters are often crooks of broken ideals who have got devilish and pessimistic because the folk who ought to be the arbiters of elegance fall down on the water jump. We have an idea, some darned few of us, of a system of preserving an aristocracy, and we hate to see rank out-

siders bulging into it and rigging the race."

"Quite so," said John Paul. "You make it your high endeavor to keep the sheep and the goats apart."

"Right. Our conscientious mission is to ride herd on the social drove and to prevent stampeding by gentle process of milling and free use of the quirt, and to stop efforts at brand changing and generally police the outfit and its range. But, of course, we can't be expected to do all this for nothing."

"Of course not," John Paul admitted. "Since you are the police force of social reputations, you are entitled to your little graft. By the way, I never see your illuminating sheet, but I suppose that Mrs. Ord is one of its stars."

Fisher shook his head.

"Her name scarcely ever appears," said he. "In the first place, it's hardly worth while to knock a woman who writes such books as hers and gets them past the censor by some sort of magic and sells about a million copies a year. To slap her for misbehavior would be rather like spanking the Venus de Milo for indecent exposure—sheer wasted effort. And besides, nobody's ever been able to prove any actual misbehavior on her."

John Paul was conscious of a certain relief.

"I rather imagined as much," said he.

"Well," said Fisher, "that doesn't make her any the less dangerous or in danger. Socrates was a man of great personal rectitude, and yet they condemned him to death on the charge of corrupting the youth. By the way, John Paul, if you had taken the trouble to read my secret writings, you'd have found that you'd had one friend in an unexpected quarter."

John Paul's face showed his keen surprise and a sudden pleasure.

"Really, Fisher? I must say that was decent of you. I took it for

granted that you'd roasted me to the handle."

"I didn't roast you at all. I always loved you purists about as much as a hobo loves his bath, but it roused some latent sense of fair play in me to see the rotten means they used to let you down. You may not know, John Paul, but some of our best people are such slimy, slinking Pharisees as to make us who check them up or squeeze them for a little blackmail look like ruddy angels of light."

"It wouldn't take a special committee to convince me of that," said John Paul with a smile. He glanced at his watch.

"I won't keep you longer from your date," said Fisher, "but I wish you'd get me a bid out aboard, if you can see your way to it."

"I can," said John Paul promptly, "and I will." His opinion of this man had undergone considerable change. "Provided, of course, the lady has nothing against you."

"She's got no reason to," said Fisher, "but I shall whisper once more in your ear that in my opinion it would be rather better for a chap like yourself, if she weren't to get to like you too well."

"Now, see here!" said John Paul. "Just what are you trying to say?"

"Well," said Fisher slowly, "let's put it this way. Unless I've got her wrong, she is a very capable absorber of personalities."

"I see. But so far she's proved a shock absorber for me, and, as I've already remarked, that's worth a lot."

"Right," said Fisher, and with a nod moved off.

CHAPTER IV.

One day about a week later, John Paul got a boatman to set him out aboard the *Lotus*. He found Mrs. Ord alone, her three girl guests having gone ashore. To classify these young ladies was impossible for John Paul. They

were of rather more than average intelligence, he thought, and gave all surface indications of good breeding and education, but he was unable to understand quite how the reputations of such girls could be maintained under the chaperonage of a woman who, by her writings and freedom of living, appeared to keep a perfect shower of bonnets going over the mill. Then Mrs. Ord enlightened him.

"These maids of honor of mine are what you might call social refugees," said she. "They are girls of good family who, not through any error or indiscretion, have deliberately preferred to defy Mrs. Grundy and have a good time rather than obey her and have a fairly stupid one."

"A good many got that habit during the war," John Paul observed.

"Yes, and it's been a sort of stampede. How is your state of soul to-day?"

"Strongly convalescent, but I wish I knew just why you so kindly undertook my case."

She gave him her level look, that cool look which yet had a curious glow in it.

"Because," said she, "I want you for a dear acquaintance."

"Why not a dear friend?"

"There are too many strings on friendship. I prefer to have my courters foot-loose. There is no oath of allegiance to be taken or protection promised when I make a convert. Have I made one of you?"

"Yes, to yourself. But I'm not so sure about your theories. I'll have to watch their working out a little. But, as for you personally, I warn you now that I am in danger of growing very fond of you."

"Why?"

"There are a number of reasons," John Paul answered slowly, "but the big one is something which I can't quite get. I find about you some sort of cosmic all-womanness, and I can feel a

richness and a sort of tremendous allure which is a bit upsetting. The working of your mind is like a gentle intellectual massage—what the Japs call *lumi-lumi*—and when you move you possess a flowing grace which is almost a caress. Physically, you are the type I most admire, with your perfectly rounded femininity draping a splendid strength. If I had to spend the rest of my life on a happy desert island and were given my choice of a dozen carefully selected female companions, or you, I should choose you."

"You appear," said Mrs. Ord, "to have the makings of the perfect lover."

"And what is your idea of that?"

"One who would keep on loving, not as a friend or mate but as a lover."

"And do you think," asked John Paul, "that is would be possible to keep on being always a lover without the mate part of it?"

"I am convinced," said Mrs. Ord, "that such is the only way in which it could possibly be managed. You see, John Paul, you have to keep on wanting to keep on loving."

John Paul nodded.

"I see your point, which is, that one cannot preserve one's appetite immediately after a satisfying meal."

"Precisely. The great poets and tragedians have always understood this."

"Wouldn't that sort of lover or loving become a good deal of a strain, or a bit of nuisance?" asked John Paul.

She shook her head.

"No more than the constant yearning for an ideal." Her eyes fastened upon his and at something in their depths, John Paul's heart raced off tumultuously. "I should like to have a lover like that, John Paul. I have always longed for such a lover—one whom I should always want in fullest measure and one who would always want me with equal ardor, so that we would both

keep on yearning and yearning and yet never bring our love to consummation."

"A big order," muttered John Paul.

"It would only be possible to a thinker like myself and a thinker and purist like yourself. But one would have to make up one's mind resolutely at the first that there was to be no final culmination."

"And how would you keep this ardor fed?" John Paul asked.

She tilted back her head and looked down at him along the line of her soft cheeks, and her lips, which were wide and delightfully full; the upper, curled, wore a baffling smile.

"Just as we are feeding it now," said she.

John Paul drew a deep breath, then shook his head.

"I'm afraid I wouldn't be up to it," said he. "It seems to me that what you describe belongs purely to a maternal or filial or fraternal love, but could scarcely exist between unmated lovers."

"Well," said Mrs. Ord, "it's being pretty constantly proved that it can't continue between mated ones."

The conversation was interrupted at this moment in a very tawdry manner, as often happens in the case of lofty communions, a good deal as a man might get a violent cramp of the leg when kneeling at his devotions.

John Paul, glancing idly toward the shore, saw approaching a little rowboat, the bow ridiculously out of water, the stern almost submerged from the considerable bulk of Fisher who was sitting there, his knees drawn up, his stick between them, cigarette in mouth, and hat tilted back on his head. The motive power of this shallop was a diminutive colored boy who appeared to be making gallant efforts to reach the water with the blades of his oars, so that the craft, as a whole, had somewhat the expression of a squat beetle

with two legs staggering out painfully at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"Speaking of spiritual love," said John Paul disgustedly, "here comes a chronicler of the carnal sort—the chief scandalmonger of the four hundred."

Mrs. Ord looked in the direction of the boat, then laughed.

"I can never soar without getting a gnat in my eye," said she. "It's 'Len' Fisher. Now what the devil does he want?"

"There's no great harm in Fisher," said John Paul, "and his gig shows at least an admirable democracy."

The flat skiff staggered alongside; then Fisher, without waiting for an invitation, came up the ladder. In no wise embarrassed at Mrs. Ord's cool bow, or John Paul's frown, he tossed away his cigarette and approached them with the peculiar jauntiness often to be found in heavy, flaccid men.

"I am sorry to intrude, Mrs. Ord," said he, "but partly by accident and partly through my gumshoe affiliations I have just learned something which I thought you ought to know immediately."

Mrs. Ord's brows straightened, and John Paul, watching her, saw that here, not far beneath the surface, lay masked a temperament of no small voltage.

"Really?" she answered in a purring quality of voice. "That is most kind of you, I'm sure."

"Why, yes," said Fisher, "it really is, because it's almost certain that the tip will be traced to me and not greatly to my profit. I've just learned that your house boat is to be raided shortly after dark."

Mrs. Ord appeared to stiffen.

"Raided?" she asked.

"That is the only fitting word," said Fisher. "There have been some complaints about the gayety of your parties and the considerable extent of your cellar, if a boat can be said to have a

cellar. These buzzards are planning to swoop down on you to-night."

Mrs. Ord did not look particularly disturbed. In fact, her face cleared a little.

"That's mighty good of you, Fisher," said she. "You're dead sure about it, I suppose?"

"I wish I were as sure of getting a check in time to pay my laundry bill," said Fisher.

"Oh, don't let that bother you!" said Mrs. Ord. "I'll send you half an hour's income if worst comes to the worst. In fact, I've felt for some time that I owed you something for not knocking my crowd, and this would have been a perfectly beautiful scoop. The question is, what am I to do?"

"There's only one thing to do," said Fisher, "and it's got to be done with wings on it. That's to pull up and out of here. Sometimes these joy killers can't wait."

Mrs. Ord stamped upon the deck.

"But that's just the cursed part of it," said she. "I can't get out. I gave my captain and engineer twenty-four hours' leave this morning, and not having enough seagoing joy riding, they've taken the Indian River trip and won't be back until to-morrow."

"Well," said John Paul, "I don't wear my name for nothing. I'm a perfectly good navigator, and could run this pleasure packet anywhere you like, if we could collar somebody to keep the wheels going round."

"As for that," said Fisher, "before I came a cropper in the Grand Box Cañon which abuts on Trinity Church, I did a lot of motor yachting and used to go in for the New York-Bermuda races. What I don't know about marine gas engines would fill a volume, not a large volume, but that same one about the size of 'Who's Who' with the same print. Small talk aside, though, I'm quite sure I could urge this one on its

way after I'd felt its pulse and looked at its throat and taken its temperature."

Mrs. Ord looked from one to the other a good deal as the Queen of Sheba might have eyed the messengers of good news. She laughed.

"Here's a situation," said she. "Evelyn Ord, the infamous authoress of 'Wings of Gauze,' et cetera, et cetera, snatched from the clutches of the law about to fasten on her for wholesale booze running and operating a gambling joint within the three-mile limit, and snatched from the law by John Paul Jones, the purist prophet, and Delancey Fisher, the moral mentor of *Town Troubles*. Oh, dear—what fun!"

"It would be a great lay for me," said Fisher, "because it would delay embarrassing explanations to that ten-acre hash and hold-up factory over in the shade of the sheltering palms."

"It is all that's needed to put the finishing touches on me," said John Paul, "and that's precisely what I'm looking for. But I think that I'd better run over and settle up for Fisher and myself. It is bad luck to go to sea without paying your laundry bill. Any sailor will tell you that. Besides, there's really no need for adding bad debts to our other crimes."

"Then go," said Mrs. Ord. "On your way as fast as the launch will carry you, and bring back the girls. They're at the Casino."

"Are we all gassed up?" Fisher asked.

"We are all everything up. To tell the truth, I've rather wondered if something of this sort might not happen. Where shall we go?"

"Oh, that's the least of our cares!" said Fisher. "In fact, mine are already over."

Mrs. Ord pressed a button and the steward appearing, told him to bid the quartermaster get away the launch.

When she had gone below Fisher looked at John Paul.

2—Ains.

"Just tell the valet to throw my things into the bag, old man, will you?" said he. "And I say, I don't want to add to your chagrin, but this is actually your party."

"My party?"

"'Fraid so. You see, a bunch of the old cats over there, toms as well as tabbies, have been watching you pretty close and buzzing about your fresh departure. So finally, they got their heads together and fixed it to put a fresh one over on you."

The tensity of eyes and jaws which had marked the features of John Paul on his arrival and then been ironed away within the last ten days returned with grim emphasis at this bit of news.

"My word!" said he. "They thought I hadn't been scored off hard enough."

"Well, I don't know as it was entirely that," said Fisher with nicety, "but Evelyn has always been a sort of poisoned dart in their pure souls, and no doubt they saw the lovely chance of an enfilading fire to get two birds with the same stone. Very likely some of them may have looked at it from a different slant and felt sorry for you and wanted to rescue you from burning the little of your scorched soul that was left."

"They mean to make a thorough job of it," said John Paul, "so we've got to give them credit for that at least."

"Yes," said Fisher, "let's give everybody credit for everything they've got, but in the meantime let's see what we can do to fool them and be consistent with the spirit of the age."

"Well, then," said John Paul, "let's forehead it. To take an estimate of what we've got, can you really run the motors of this boat or are you simply stalling along?"

"I can run them," said Fisher. "I always had a bit of knack at machinery and I spent about twelve hours patching up the engines on a New York-Bermuda motor-boat race when the mechanics were all laid out from a

combination of gas fumes, raw eggs, whisky, and seasickness."

"Well, then," said John Paul, "go down and look things over and I'll be off ashore and get us cleared."

CHAPTER V.

To John Paul, coming out from under the double awnings to get aboard the launch, there seemed to be something a little off with his eyes. As a matter of fact, it was merely because his eyes were uncommonly perceptive to color that they were conscious of certain subtle changes in the solar spectrum. The sun was still bright and doing its best to justify the statements of its perfection in that region, printed in the leaflets of railroads and hotels.

But, nevertheless, it was off color, and John Paul had not enough of sea experience to place the blame where it belonged. He had not boasted in stating himself to be a perfectly good navigator, but he had perfected and practiced this science on an arctic exploration in which he had taken part on leaving college, and since then most of his navigating had been on occasional big game-hunting expeditions. He actually possessed, however, some knowledge of boats acquired in yachting cruises and did not anticipate any difficulty in taking the *Lotus* wherever desired.

His errand ashore was quickly accomplished and he returned to where the launch was waiting, followed by porters with his own and Fisher's effects. The three girls he had already sent aboard. This maneuver did not pass entirely unobserved, and if John Paul had not been thoroughly inoculated against raised eyebrows, significant glances, and remarks in undertones, he might have been annoyed. But actually he was too much preoccupied to notice them at all.

He appreciated fully that this last act

was such as must burn all his bridges behind him and put the final brand of infamy on his character as hypocrite and Pharisee.

Such few persons as might have thought him to be a scapegoat in the attempt to establish a National Purity Movement must now decide that it had been no more than a blatant gesture to cover personal indulgence on a gilded scale. Of course the circle of friends who knew him personally would conclude sadly that, in his rage and humiliation at what had happened, he had decided that there was no good in having the name without the game and concluded to run at large. John Paul did not care what they thought. His amour propre had been too thoroughly paralyzed.

On the contrary, his sense of humor, hitherto latent but recently burgeoning under gayety and laughter now responded to the bizarre situation of his undertaking to pilot out of the sweeping arm of the law a woman notorious for her risqué writings and absolute personal defiance of social conventions. And with her three young and pretty rebels and a rounder of broken fortunes, generally assumed to eke out an uncertain livelihood through scandal-mongering and blackmail! John Paul wondered what his grim old Uncle Amos would have to say about this démarche when it reached his ears, but he thought it more than probable that the hard old financier would receive it with a sardonic chuckle.

On going aboard he heard the low pur of the powerful engines, twin engines of seventy-five horse power each, and he was relieved to know that Fisher had justified his claims.

Entering the pretty saloon, for the house boat like most of her type was spacious and luxurious of appointments, he found Mrs. Ord and the three girls examining a chart.

"Fisher seems to understand his

"job," said Mrs. Ord over her shoulder. "You left my note for the skipper?"

"Yes," said John Paul, "and I asked if anything had been seen of the other two men, but could get no line on them."

"That leaves us only Larsen and the chef and Saki," said Mrs. Ord.

"Well," said John Paul, "that ought to be enough to go on for a simple getaway. Where do you want to get?"

"Fisher says it's no use putting in anywhere along this shore as the cabal against us is pretty vicious and we'd merely get collared wherever we fetched up. He thinks we'd better run to Nassau. That's only about two hundred miles. Do you think you could pilot us there?"

John Paul examined the chart, which was one from Cape Canaveral to Havana with the Straits of Florida and Bahama Banks.

"As easy as driving down Fifth Avenue," said he, "with the present traffic signals. What speed can we do?"

"About twelve in smooth water without driving the engines."

"Call it an easy eighteen-hour run. Your quartermaster and I can spell each other at the wheel, and Fisher can sleep with the engines."

"I can steer by compass, myself," said Mrs. Ord.

"If we get right away," said John Paul, "we should be off the light on Southwest Point by midnight. It's a cinch. A schoolgirl could take the boat down."

"Then let's start," said Mrs. Ord. "You're in command."

John Paul saluted with a flourish.

"Like most captains in the army, I always wanted to be one in the navy. It's so much cleaner. All hands, get the ship under way!"

He stepped outside and beckoned to the Swedish quartermaster.

"Larsen," said he, "we've got to get out right off. They've cooked up a job

ashore to raid us to-night when the party's in full swing."

Larsen raised his white, bushy eyebrows. He was the usual type of Swede yacht sailor and looked honest and capable.

"Aye, zir," said he. "I ban tink we get pinched some day."

"Well, we'll try to fool them. Get up anchor as quick as you can. Drop the launch astern. If they see us hoisting her aboard they might whip out here and grab us."

Larsen scratched his head.

"Mebbe we better wait until it commence to get dark, zir," said he. "A fast police launch mide lay us aboard before we ged outside der tree-mile limit."

"We'll take a chance on that," said John Paul. "By the time they learn what's up, we ought to be well away."

"Aye, aye, zir," said Larsen. "I ban get cookee to bear a hand."

John Paul went to the engine-room hatch.

"We're going to get right out, Fisher," he called. "Everything all set in your department?"

"She seems to be clicking along like a sewing machine," said Fisher. "There are a few dinkums here I haven't quite doped out, but I count on getting acquainted as we go along. How about your wheelhouse controls?"

"I can show you how they work," said a throaty voice at John Paul's elbow. "It's all very simple and fool proof. This boat handles as easily as my big car. Larsen understands everything, anyhow."

The fine, able boat, designed for offshore runs as well as shallow, sheltered waterways, quickly gathered way, and even if a pursuit had been launched almost immediately, it is doubtful if anything would have overhauled her before she had swum clear of the danger zone.

Mrs. Ord came into the wheelhouse

where John Paul was cheerfully steering the course which he had laid to strike the middle of the Northwest Providence Channel.

"I hope," said she, "that you quite realize what I'm letting you in for."

"Quite so," he answered cheerfully. "Your game is much more square than the last one I played. On the whole I find it far more satisfactory to be considered a villain than a fool."

"Incidentally," she answered, "it's a good deal safer. A villain has usually some idea of what he's up against, whereas a fool does not."

"He has more fun, too," John Paul agreed. "It might surprise you to know that I'm having the time of my life. I can look back on a career of hard work and high endeavor and strife and a good deal of righteous wrath, or what I fondly fancied to be such, but I can't honestly say that I ever got any special pleasure out of it."

"What is Uncle Amos going to say?"

"Not yet having acquired the habit of profanity," said John Paul, "I shan't attempt to tell you. Yet I've a hunch that he will wear an inner grin."

Larsen looked up from the little scrap of forward deck where he had been lashing at the anchor.

"I tink we ban ketch some dirty wedder," said he.

John Paul glanced at the barometer and tapped it lightly with his fingers. The needle shifted backward a trifle to leave a space of three tenths between it and the register.

"Did you notice the glass this morning?" he asked Mrs. Ord.

"No," she answered, "but it's apt to be low here at this season."

"If that was set this morning," said John Paul, "then 'I ban tink' Larsen is right. It would show a pretty sudden drop. Besides, it struck me when I was going ashore that there was a curious effect in the sunlight, but I thought it

might be my eyes or liver or something. Notice those shadows!"

"They don't look quite right, do they?" she admitted. "We might get a squall or something before morning, but this boat is very able in spite of looking like such a box."

"No trouble about the boat," said John Paul. "But all things being equal, I'd as leave have clear weather to run down through this place. Rotten shoals and reefs and things. That reminds me that we're breaking another law or several. No licensed pilot or engineer aboard or papers or anything."

"I don't think we're apt to be bothered," said she. "They're far too glad to welcome rich Americans in the West Indies. I've usually found that money will clear most anything."

"But a good name," said John Paul.

"That," said Mrs. Ord, "is, as Fisher says, the very least of our cares."

John Paul looked at her curiously.

"Don't you ever really care at all?" he asked.

"Not two cents. If I were a mother I might, or even a member of a distinguished family like yourself, with relatives to be hurt. But nowadays everybody appears to be doing about what he can manage without getting arrested. Since they've put the ban on liberty and the pursuit of pleasure, we've most of us become sort of semioutlaws."

"It does take a bit of doing," John Paul admitted. "Now in Europe we'd all be considered merely a chic outfit and regarded with approval as contributing to the gayety and color of life and giving honest purveyors of such a chance to live. But here we're hounded from a fashionable resort like a band of crooks, and not long ago I was one of the hounds," he added thoughtfully.

"Well," said Mrs. Ord, "it's all reactionary, I suppose, and history repeats itself. If we'd carried on the same way in Salem, Massachusetts, two

hundred years ago, they'd have clapped us in the stocks."

"And yet," said John Paul, musingly, "I can't help feeling that there ought to be some reasonable limit, some middle course of moderation."

Larsen looked up again.

"We mide hist der launch aboard, zir," said he.

"All right," said John Paul. "I'll lend you a hand. Do you think we're going to get some nasty weather?"

"Yas—no—mebbe so. I tink so, mebbe not," was the quartermaster's illuminating answer. "Before morning I tink we ban catch a little vind and a r-rain. I tink I furl der awnings and mak all zecure."

"He thinks we're going to catch something," said John Paul, "and so do I. Perhaps it might be wiser to take the chance of getting nabbed and run down the beach into Hillsboro."

"No," said Mrs. Ord, "I'd rather finish what we've started."

"You couldn't collect any insurance if we were to get slammed up on a shoal," said John Paul.

"We're not going to get slammed up on these shoals or any others." She moved a little closer to look into the binnacle so that her arm and upper shoulder pressed against John Paul's. He was wearing a silk shirt, the sleeves rolled up and the throat opened, but the air had grown intensely sultry with such little air as was stirring coming off the flat, sun-baked coast. "I'll steer while you help Larsen," said she and took the wheel, her soft, strong hands disengaging his from the spokes in a scarcely perceptible manner which was yet caressing. From the very first it had seemed to John Paul that "caressing" was the proper adjective to qualify this woman. Her voice had first caressed him and her easy gestures had an enticement and a lure of which the caressing quality was in the future

tense, as though they promised caresses if their significance was followed. But all was infinitely subtle and as impalpable as that steady, yet enveloping look which streamed often from her light-gray eyes, these latter of a slightly greenish tint, yet warm, like shoal sea water with the sun shining on the sand just under it. She seemed as limpid as water, yet possessing its profundity.

So far no detail of this caressing quality about her had been tangible except for the handclasp of welcome and parting and a little habit she possessed of tapping his shoulder when desiring to enforce some argument, but this touch was less intimate than persuasive. And after their first mutual portrayal of the positions in which they stood to the world she had made no effort at even a friendly intimacy, that is, since the time of her telling him her idea of what a perfect lover might be. There had been no detailed personalities.

Once or twice John Paul had reflected that if she were weaving any spell about him the process was too insidious to be so far realized. She had never even insisted on his presence at any of her parties or expeditions, and the present singular position was entirely of his making. He could form no idea of where it might be leading, nor had he thought about this much. He had allowed himself to drift.

As he now went aft to help Larsen hoist aboard the light launch, Fisher came out on deck wiping his dripping face on a handful of clean waste. He was in a sleeveless singlet, and John Paul was surprised at the contour and power of his corded muscles and the depth of his chest, for he had never seen Fisher in a bathing suit and had thought of him as thick and flaccid.

"My aunt, but it's hot!" said Fisher cheerfully, and removed some smudges on his big triceps. "You may observe, John Paul, that I am the real thing. When a machinist wipes his beak on a

piece of waste, he belongs to the brotherhood."

"You've got more in your box of tricks than I'd have given you credit for," said John Paul. "I'm afraid that hitherto I've done you injustice."

Fisher's face seemed to darken a little.

"Don't be too sure of that just yet, my boy," said he.

"Well, all the same," said John Paul, "I think you're a good chap, Fisher."

"Shut up," said Fisher sharply. "Let's bear a hand and get this dinky tub swung in and well lashed. I don't know how much of a sailor you are, but it's plain enough to even the sea-going chauffeur that I've been that we're going to get a bit of a twister, a hard squall I should say, and between now and morning. Have you looked at the glass?"

"It's dropping fast," said John Paul. "Larsen doesn't seem to think it's going to amount to much, though."

They turned their attention to the work in hand; then snugly furled and lashed the awnings.

"I think I'd like a drink," said Fisher. "No, I'll stand it off until we get there. That used to be my trouble, you know."

"I repeat," said John Paul. "You certainly improve on acquaintance, old fellow."

Fisher swung about with something of the gesture of a wild boar.

"Now see here, John Paul," said he, "I want you to can that stuff." At the tone of his voice John Paul stared at him, astonished. One might have thought that he had offered an insult instead of a friendly expression of esteem.

"Sorry," said he a little shortly. "I didn't mean to be patronizing. I know that you like to drink and it strikes me as very decent that you should want to stand it off until you are quit of this responsibility."

Fisher hooked his thumbs in his belt and, with his big muscles sagging and head a bit aslant, looked at John Paul with a frown.

"John Paul," said he, "booze did for me, and it did for my brother Jack who was a damned sight better man. But he came back; thanks to you."

"To me?" John Paul gasped.

"Jus' so. Jack was down and out, a bum, a sort of tout until he got too blurred even for graft. Then he fell into your hands down in one of your save-the-pieces joints, over against the Five Points, and you dragged him out of the mire and got him on his feet and staked him for a fresh start, and he's going strong now out in Colorado. That's the reason I've always laid off you and backed your plays."

"Well," said John Paul slowly, "I'm glad to know about that. If I could carry on with the rest of the family without seeming to play out of form with my new hand, it would please me a lot."

"John Paul," said Fisher, "take it from me, your new hand is rotten. It's not your class. I wish you'd shuffle the cards and cut and get back on your old game."

John Paul looked at him with astonishment.

"What are you driving at now?" he asked. "What's the matter with this outfit?"

"I'll admit," said Fisher, ignoring the question, "that you overplayed your last bet and got it in the neck. But all the same it was better than this."

John Paul's face grew a little grim.

"Will you please answer my question? What's the matter with this crowd?"

Fisher shrugged his big shoulders.

"Oh, I suppose I might as well tell you!" said he. "I wouldn't otherwise be true to my own form which is straight and square, like a boomerang. About three steps in any one direction

is my limit. Well, then, to answer your question, Evelyn is about what she advertises herself to be, I guess, and I've got nothing on the girls, but this whole damned-fool business is a plant."

They were standing against the taffrail out of all possible earshot of any one, and under the stern the blind water was sucking away in whorls and eddies as the boat forged swiftly on her course. Fisher spat over the side, looked around the thickening horizon, then up at the bilious sky, which seemed now to begin directly over their heads.

"We're going to have a dirty night," said he, "and I don't know how long the slam is going to last or how bad it may prove, or how much of a navigator you may be. Morning may find us in a hell of a mess. I know these waters pretty well. Take my advice, John Paul, and turn this thing around and go back while the going's good. It will be dark in half an hour, and once this thing breaks you're not going to be able to pick up your lights. It's apt to break most any minute, too. You see the way it's blackening in the north-east. She's coming, boy, and she's coming hell bent."

"I think your advice is good," said John Paul. "I've already suggested that to Mrs. Ord, but she says to hold on for Nassau. She says she'd rather take a chance with the weather than with getting pinched."

Fisher swore.

"Pinched, hell!" said he. "She's in no danger of being pinched. She's got too much paid protection."

"Then why," asked John Paul, his pleasant voice gone suddenly hard, "did you come out and tell us that the boat was due to get raided to-night?"

Fisher drew down the corners of his mouth.

"Because she paid me to," said he. "I was jammed up in the corner, flat

broke, owed everybody, couldn't stay and didn't dare to leave, and looking always for a bit of graft when she put this deal up to me. She wanted you where she wanted you." He paused, panting, and mopped his dripping face with the waste, then looked at John Paul with a sort of mocking challenge.

"Go on," said John Paul quietly, "it's all mighty interesting if a bit obscure. Why should she have wanted to abduct me, since that appears to be about the size of it, and when does the vamping begin?"

"Well," said Fisher, "I can't promise you much about the vamping, because from what I know about Evelyn her methods are not of the classic movie sort. But she wanted to make you cut the last lines that held you to your own particular sort. Your merely coming out aboard for parties or taking a turn ashore with her was not enough. She wanted you to do just what you've done, pack your duffel and take up your quarters in her camp. She knew that that would finally cook your goose as far as any doubts might be left of your having been hitherto an innocent victim of cruel conspiracy. Now do you get it?"

"Not entirely," said John Paul, with a return to his pleasant voice. "My sufferings must have made me thick. Granted that her amiable intention was such as you describe, what was then her motive? Is all this evidence of wealth and luxury a bluff? Is she merely the beautiful adventuress making a show on credit and blowing her book royalties before she gets them, and now at the end of her tether obliged to make some coup? Is it her desperate intention to entrap the rich young man and make him come across?"

Fisher shook his head, but there was an expression of uncertainty on his oily face which, like the face of John Paul, had a chromatic tint in the peculiar, viscid atmosphere.

"I don't think so," he answered. "I can't be sure, but I doubt that money graft is her game. So far as I've been able to discover, Evelyn's got kale enough. She's supposed to be hauling down a big income from the estate of her husband who was a rich, wholesale-drug man. She put this thing across for some good reason of her own"—he glanced a little mockingly at the other—"and as I was so hard driven for a piece of money, I fell for it. For one thing, it appealed to my distorted, mangled sense of humor, and it didn't strike me there could be any great hardship or danger in a sound, sane man of thirty and odd being grabbed off by as pretty a woman as Evelyn Ord, as many a man would pay high for the privilege. Besides I'd already warned you what might happen. But"—he glanced around at the ominous and sinister changes which now seemed closing in like a pall—"I hadn't counted on this."

John Paul glanced about him also, indifferently, as it seemed to Fisher who was closely watching him.

"Well," said he in a tone a bit too light to be entirely a natural one, "if the weather's getting thicker every minute, then all I can say is, it's got nothing on me. Even now I can't see to the bottom of the glass."

Fisher swung upon him almost in a rage.

"Good heavens, man!" said he savagely. Then he gave a despairing laugh and flung up both hands in a gesture of surrender. "If, by this time, you can't see the writing on the wall, then I'm not going to get a piece of chalk and figure it out for you on the deck. Take my advice and turn the boat around and beat it back."

John Paul stared at the inky blue massing on the port helm, then looked at Fisher with a grim smile.

"No," said he, "I think we'll hold on our course."

CHAPTER VI.

John Paul went into the wheelhouse, glanced at the compass, then looked at Evelyn with a smile.

"You steer a very true, straight course," said he.

She gave him an answering smile.

"Thanks. I've always tried to go straight to what I want, once I've made up my mind that I really want it."

"Most people never get as far as that," John Paul observed. "I've just been talking to Fisher. He seems to be more of a sailor than I'd ever have guessed. He tells me that he's pretty familiar with these waters and that in his opinion we're going to get a particularly wicked squall, and he advises that we put back."

"It does look ugly," she answered. "What do you think yourself?"

"Oh, I don't know," John Paul answered, "but it seems to me that we might as well hold on! The boat is staunch and able and Fisher seems to understand the engines, and if we keep on steering straight I don't see why we shouldn't manage well enough."

"Precisely my idea," she agreed. "Besides, I've always had a superstition about turning back."

"It's rather more than a superstition with me," said John Paul, "it amounts to a principle. The turners back never seem to get anywhere."

"Or if they do," she amended, "it's not where they want to get, and they always have the discomforting reflection that they might have arrived, if they'd kept on. To tell the truth, John Paul, this seems to do me a lot of good. It satisfies a craving for adventure that I've neglected lately. I don't care if we do get into a cyclone or something and have to fight it out—together." She turned and gave him such a look as he could not remember having seen in her eyes before. "You and I," she murmured.

"And Fisher," said John Paul dryly. "We mustn't forget Fisher, who is the real god from the machine."

She stiffened a little.

"Oh, Fisher!" said she contemptuously. "These engines will run themselves, so long as the gas and oil hold out."

"I hope so," said John Paul. "Time was when it took a genius to keep a gas engine going, but I suppose that nowadays it takes a fool to interfere with its good action."

Evelyn released the wheel, and John Paul took it, then reached up and tapped the barometer again.

"The bottom is dropping out of it," said he, "but it's falling so fast that I think the squall won't last long. Your real, old, West Indies hurricane, with whiskers on, comes up more slowly. I'd like it better, though, if it had some fireworks about it. However, if the worst comes to the worst, we can run up under the lee of the beach somewhere and anchor. This boat can't draw more than three or four feet of water."

Larsen's voice boomed out at their elbows.

"Here she come, zir," said he. "Mebbe we ban best swing her oop to take it head on."

"Right-o!" said John Paul. "Come in, Larsen."

Larsen obeyed, then closed the heavy glass. Through this they now could see, at no great distance, what looked like a white wall of foaming water which, against the blue-black zone of sea and sky, between which there was no demarcation, suggested a thin band of tape passed around the middle of a globe of ink. This quickly broadened and all at once the house boat seemed to check and pause as if struck back by repeated blows from great, soft, invisible hands, while hoarse, roaring voices urged them to increase the violence of impact. And this order was

conscientiously obeyed, for these pawing hands became harder and faster and more furious and reached down to scoop up the water in great furrows and fling it against the heavy, curved crown glass.

"Take her, Larsen," said John Paul quietly. "You understand the handling of her better. I shall have to keep track of our course now so as not to get lost if this lasts very long." And he called down through the tube to Fisher to look out for a knockdown.

Then the body of the squall struck and it seemed for the next few moments as if they were in the rush of a horizontal waterfall. With engines slowed to the point of merely holding steerageway, the *Lotus* nosed her way into the cyclonic burst, and John Paul was filled with admiration at the stolid Larsen's handling of her.

John Paul was no great seaman, but his engineering knowledge of varying stresses, backed by a certain amount of yachting experience, told him that even for a boat as stable and broad of beam as this the danger would lie from the windage of her high deck house. This, if it were to swing broadside on, might be enough to heave her over until the cabin windows coming awash, with no underbody to steady her, she might easily fill and founder. But Larsen, mindful of this danger more through nautical instinct than imagination, kept making of her bow a sort of weather vane which followed the terrific flaws back and forth and seemed to adjust their resultants.

This maneuvering continued for perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes, by which time the sea began to make, though not very greatly, as they were under the shelter of the little Bahama Bank and the scope was not broad enough to stir up more than a nasty chop. At the very first the violence of the wind was so great as merely to rip up the surface water and fling it hori-

zontally in sheets with no great amount of undulation, but in half an hour's time the chop grew vicious, so that the scant foredeck was being washed with every plunge despite the bluff, high bows and slow speed.

Mrs. Ord had left the wheelhouse through the door in its after bulkhead which led down past the pantry to the saloon. John Paul, after watching Larsen's maneuvers for a little while and discovering that, so far as he could estimate, the boat was practically at a standstill in actual position, went down the ladder into the engine room where he found Fisher moving about like a sort of squat-setting troll, feeling bearings and carefully watching the lubrication. The atmosphere of the place was overpowering from the combination of fumes of gas and oil and heat from the engines, so that John Paul, accustomed to free air, wondered how Fisher could survive it.

"Some little hell, what?" asked Fisher cheerfully. "The ventilators blew off or else have been bent flat or something so that the air is sultry." And he hummed a little song which had to do with the pleasures of a sailor's life.

"I suppose," said John Paul, gripping a stanchion, "if I were to pay you a compliment on sticking to your job, you'd hit me with a spanner."

"Oh, I'm used to vitiated air!" said Fisher. "Besides, I've been through this sort of thing before, in some of those early New York-Bermuda motor-boat races I spoke about this afternoon. But how about yours?"

"Larsen is holding mine down for the moment," said John Paul. "Can't you come up and get some air?"

"Not just yet," said Fisher. "There's a carburetor here that tries to flood every time I turn my back, and we can't afford to take any chances of a dead cylinder just this minute. This can't last long, though what I'm afraid of is

that it may be just the overture for a hard young hurricane."

The *Lotus* swashed stubbornly on her course. John Paul and Larsen spelled each other at the wheel. Fisher, having got the engines running to his satisfaction, paid them but occasional visits, spending most of the night in the saloon, napping or talking to Evelyn or John Paul. The three girls had succumbed to seasickness.

"Such a squall as this," said Fisher languidly at about ten o'clock, "is rather like a lovers' quarrel, apt to whip around suddenly and blow back from the other direction. Therefore I'd advise sticking out in the middle of the channel. The good, old boat takes it like a Dutch fishwife in an April shower. But unless it blows over by six o'clock to-morrow morning, we'll have to run in for shelter behind the end of Great Abaco Island, as otherwise we catch the full sweep of it driving into Northeast Channel."

"The glass is stationary," said John Paul.

"Well, when it starts to rise," said Fisher, "it will blow harder than ever, if that's possible, but I doubt if it lasts long."

Mrs. Ord had very little to say, but it was evident to John Paul that she was deeply plunged in reflections entirely removed from the turmoil of surrounding conditions. The wind appeared to have settled down to a hard, steady gale, but the stanch house boat was making splendid weather of it despite the churning and crashing of the short, choppy sea. He had told Fisher not to betray the fact that he suspected any trick in their voyage, and he now waited curiously for its dénouement and to see what would be the next move of this strong-willed, inscrutable woman who wrote with such unrestrained license, yet seemed ready to stop at nothing to gain whatever end she might have in view. From the look

in her gray eyes, when once or twice they rested on him as they sat alone in the saloon, steadyng themselves against the lurching sling of the boat, he wondered if she were not on the verge of a confession. He neither invited nor repelled confession, but conducted himself precisely as if there were nothing out of place beyond the unexpected meteorological conditions. John Paul was astonished to find such splendid weatherly qualities in the vessel and, as the night wore on and they sighted and passed the light on Southwest Point of Bahama Island, he decided they were actually in no danger, so long as the engines continued to perform their duty.

His respect for Fisher rose hourly. A wrong one the man might be, unscrupulous and, by his own confession, a double traitor, first to John Paul for whom he had expressed a friendship which was the result of a fraternal obligation, and to Mrs. Ord whose bribe he had accepted to destroy the lingering vestiges of such respect as John Paul might still feel in his quality of reformer and uplift advocate. But now as he observed Fisher's dogged determination to play his hand through and serve his assumed duties in the asphyxiating atmosphere of the engine room and deny himself the stimulation of the spirits which evidently enough he was nearly wild for, John Paul could not but feel that there was in him still a great deal of a man.

So the night passed and the gray dawn came in obscurely to show a frightful chaos of tormented water in which one could not but be amazed at the splendid performance of the boat. No land was in sight and the lashing chop was superimposed on a big swell, heaving in directly ahead. The gray, dirty scud was driving at a terrific speed close overhead and John Paul, pricking off his position by dead reckoning at six o'clock, estimated this to

be about halfway between Great Stirrup Cay and Cross Harbor, a bight near the extremity of Abaco. There was no rain, but the spindrift lashing along the surface of the water rendered the visibility extremely low, not more than half a mile at that.

And, then, as the three, John Paul, Fisher, and Evelyn, were studying the chart; and Fisher advocating that they had better change their course and nose into Cross Harbor rather than risk the passage of the Northeast Providence Channel where the gale swept in directly from open sea, Larsen looked out from the wheelhouse.

"Steamer whistle, zir," he called. "I tink she ban to windward."

John Paul went into the wheelhouse, the others following. It would have been useless to open a port on the weather side, as the rush of wind and dash of spray would have masked any noise, but the port on the lee side was open and now, as they listened tensely, there reached their ears at the end of a minute or so a series of short, staccato blasts, muffled in the clamor of wind and sea, yet faintly audible.

"That's distress!" said Fisher. "Some boat is out here, broken down or sinking or something, possibly a steamer on the passenger service from Nassau to Miami."

John Paul glanced at the compass, then looked at the chart.

"If she's out of control," said he, "this wind will carry her here, on to the shoals of the Berry Islands, and in that case God help her."

He had scarcely spoken when again came the supplicating cry for help, which from its comparatively high pitch was the cry of a small steamer. Larsen corroborated this.

"Mebbe we head over dere," said he, "but we can't do mooch."

"Head over," said John Paul, and as the boat began to swing to meet the gale he realized more fully the force

of this and the weight of the sea. Here in mid-channel the water was very deep and the great swell swinging round the point of Abaco took them more abeam, while the chop was ahead, so that they found themselves wallowing in a vortex of fearful water.

For some minutes the squat *Lotus* forced herself stubbornly ahead, her scrap of forward deck awash with every plunge and the brine sputting up over the wheelhouse. Then, suddenly, the despairing blasts were borne down from close ahead and the next instant the stricken vessel loomed out of the spindrift directly in their course, so close that if Larsen had not quickly spun the wheel, the two might have collided.

They discovered her to be a small, white steamer of the usual passenger type. She was apparently drifting almost broadside to the wind and alarmingly listed, partly from its pressure and partly, as it looked, from a sinking condition, though of this they could not be sure. In any case, it was evident that she was out of all control, still with steam enough to sound the whistle, but whether through some mishap to engine or propeller she was unable to hold head to sea and make for the shelter of Abaco.

They passed her as close aboard as safety would permit, then close astern slowed down, noticing, as they did so, that she was flying her ensign reversed.

"In a bad fix," said Fisher, "and the chances are that at this season she's full of passengers. If she washes up on the shoals with the swell that's running, then it's all up!"

John Paul had been thinking the same thing. He could imagine this none-too-stanch and rather shallow steamer drifting into the great surf of a lee shore at that moment and going to pieces like matchwood, to scatter her passengers in that indiscriminate way

which the elements sometimes show in their disregard of the value of human lives. John Paul did not share in the popular idea of the value of human life as such, as he considered that the conduct of a life was far more important than its mere continuance.

But as he looked at this white-painted box, drifting down on the shoals like a crate full of live chickens struck adrift, it impressed him that a certain obligation of human brotherhood was placed upon them all, aboard the *Lotus*, to prevent this catastrophe if possible, and if not to make the effort. In such a situation there must be decided always the relative value between one's life lost or one's honor and duty lost and the necessity of facing ever afterward the consciousness of having shirked.

"What do you think about it, Fisher?" asked John Paul. "Could we get a line to them and tow them around under the lee of Great Stirrup Cay?"

"We might, unless she sinks before we get there," Fisher answered. "What do you think, Larsen?"

The quartermaster shook his head, then nodded it according to his customary oracular method.

"Yas—no. Mebbe so. I don't tink so. Perhaps," said he.

"Can you get a line to them?" asked John Paul.

"We can drift down a life buoy on a small line wen dey can bend on their hawser und we haul her aboard und make fast," Larsen answered. "Den if our engines stand oop, I tink we mide tow dem around into shelter."

"Well, then," said John Paul, "we had better try to do that. No chance to take them off in a boat in this smother, and besides hers don't seem to be there."

"Excuse me for asking, old man," said Fisher, "but have you got a pretty good idea of just where we are?"

"I think we're here," said John Paul,

and laid the tip of his pencil about midway between Great Stirrup Cay and Southwest Point. "At any rate, once we get her in tow, all we've got to do is to head due west until we think we've given the Point a reasonably wide berth, then turn south and keep on going until we fetch up in sheltered water."

Fisher went below to stand in his engines.

John Paul looked at Mrs. Ord.

"Don't you think I'm right?" he began, then paused, struck by the expression of her face.

For it had suddenly grown hard. It was the first time that John Paul had ever seen her wear such an expression. The gray-green eyes were steady enough, but there was no softness in them, no hint of compassion or solicitude for the people in hourly danger of drowning like caged fowls. Also the soft contours of the lower part of her face had become rigid. The whimsical and erstwhile tender mouth had a fixed, unyielding look.

"It seems to me," said she, and even the quality of her throaty voice was changed, "that you are rather losing sight of your immediate responsibility, which is to get us safely out of this. We don't know just how near we may be to the shoals, and if our engines were suddenly to fail us, we should all be lost."

John Paul stared.

"Good heavens!" said he. "You don't want us to beat it into safety and leave this outfit to drown like rats in a trap?"

"You must remember," said she, "that you have four helpless women whom you are bound to get to a place of safety. There's no telling what may happen if we try to tow this big, clumsy tub."

"The chances are, Mrs. Ord," said John Paul coldly, "that there are many more helpless women aboard her, and

that their whole salvation depends on us."

"It is not our fault if they've broken down——" she began, when there came a startling interruption.

The disabled passenger steamer had drifted down until she was on the *Lotus'* quarter, while the house boat, bucking slowly into the smother, with every dip cascading the water over her bows, seemed almost stationary. The day had lightened a little, but the wind appeared, if anything, to have increased. But now, as the flying scud thinned, as it sometimes does for a few moments in such a violent, short-lived gale, Larsen, leaning out of the open window and staring to leeward, drew in his head and shoulders with a grunt.

"Dey are breakers under our lee," said he.

John Paul thrust out his head. A mile astern and a little to port he could see a long line of spouting surf, and beyond it no land, but what appeared to be a stretch of white, churning water. The terrible truth about their situation was immediately apparent to him. He realized that although they had been steering a true-enough compass course, the leeway made by the light-draft boat had been far greater than he had calculated, and that instead of being well out in the middle of the Northwest Providence Channel, their lateral drift had carried them down upon the eastern rim of the Berry Islands. It seemed to him that another half hour would find the disabled steamer in the breakers and all aboard her lost beyond any hope of rescue, as no anchors could have held her in such a sea.

The same thought had immediately occurred to Fisher. His flaccid face was set like a death mask as he looked at John Paul.

"It's touch and go, if we're to haul them clear, old man," said he.

John Paul nodded, then turned to Larsen.

"Drift down your line and look sharp," said he. "I'll put us dead to windward of the steamer, and it's up to them to get our line and send us a hawser."

"Aye, zir," said Larsen cheerfully. "I ban tink it's too late, but we gotta try." He plunged out of the wheelhouse and made his way to the lazaret, hanging on as only sailors and cats can. Fisher ducked back into the engine room.

Evelyn turned furiously on John Paul, who had taken the wheel. Her eyes were blazing now, less with fear than fury; her face was chalky. Her face showed the abstraction of all softer feminine traits, as if a personality both spiritual and physical had been treated with some reagent to dissolve the tender, cosmetic filling which had relieved the harsh angularities of frame and character and to leave them in all the prominence of their harsh landmarks, which told of force unmodified by beauty, be it body or soul.

This transformation was shocking to John Paul because his previous experience with women had never shown him anything like this. He had seen beauty harrowed by fear and suffering and famine and illness and physical distress, until it could no longer be said to have any claim to beauty. But John Paul had never seen beauty stripped away by a sudden passion of ruthless selfishness, and hate developed like an evil transformation when this selfishness is balked.

Wherefore John Paul stared aghast at this cultured woman with whom his conversations had been of lofty, beautiful things, whose creed was for indulgence where it did not clash with kindness and beauty, whose professed ideals of love were set upon a plane which even John Paul, for all of his chimerical theories of abstract purity, could never have hoped to reach. Her professed gospel had been "live and help

to live," "love and let love," and many other aesthetic hypocrisies. And now she proposed to save her pleasure-loving life at the cost of obvious duty to her kind, and glared at him like a hellcat because of his intention to risk her safety for the saving of lives no doubt more serviceable.

She gripped the wheel with a strength which he could never have guessed her to possess.

"You fool!" she snarled. "Do you want to drown us all, trying to save a boatload of rotten trippers?"

"Let go!" he answered sternly. "I'm going to drag that steamer clear if I have to wreck this flower boat of yours to do it."

"You're not!" she screamed. "This is my boat and you are nothing but a guest aboard."

"Rather more than that," said John Paul. "You told me that I was in command, and I undertook to save you from arrest and the confiscation of the yacht."

She lost her head.

"You were never in command," said she, "any more than there was ever any danger of arrest and seizure. It was all a plant." And she put out her strength against his to turn the wheel and head the boat away from the shoals. But John Paul braced his feet and forced the *Lotus* slowly in a direction which would place her in the desired position.

"Will you let go?" cried Evelyn. "Can't you see that it's too late?"

"Why, that's precisely the way it strikes me," said John Paul. "It's too late for one selfish, pampered woman to scud away to safety and leave a lot of better people to drown. Now let go yourself or I shall have to be rough."

Evelyn loosed one hand from the spoke and, grabbing a blinker light from the rack, struck viciously at his head. John Paul threw up his elbow and parried the blow. And then, in a

spasm of disgust and because he heard Larsen bellowing some advice and directions, John Paul did that which he had never done before and of which he would never have believed himself capable. This was to lay violent hands upon a woman.

He seized Evelyn by her two bare elbows, whirled her vigorously about, thrust her through the door in the after bulkhead of the wheelhouse, and gave her a shove which sent her reeling against the handrail of the little alleyway leading to the pantry, and then, seeing that she had found her balance and was for the moment safely enough disposed of, John Paul slammed the door and bolted it, and took the wheel again.

Larsen was calling up to him.

"Werk yust ahead of her, zir, and I drift out der line."

CHAPTER VII.

A few minutes later John Paul heard the roaring of the surf. He called down to Fisher.

"How are things, chief?"

"Fine and dandy," came Fisher's cheerful voice. "How about your end?"

"They've got our line," John Paul answered. "Larsen and the chef and Saki are hauling in their hawser."

"Take the strain gently at first," said Fisher.

"All right," John Paul answered.

"And I say, John Paul," said Fisher, "was I right about Evelyn?"

"Quite so," John Paul answered. "We've drifted pretty close to the breaking water."

"Oh, let her break," said Fisher, "and don't bother about me! I'll stick here until the damned tub busts open."

The next half hour saw a very critical lapse of time in the lives of a good many persons. As the hawser tautened and the full strain came upon the splen-

did engines of the *Lotus*, the helpless steamer in tow of her began to swing slowly head to sea. The question now to be decided was whether or not the house boat would have the power to haul her tow clear of the shoals under their lee and to lay a course which might carry them both to a haven of safety.

If John Paul had known precisely his position or been able to pick up any landmark through the welter, he might have saved them all a great deal of stress and strain by running straight in for the refuge of Great Harbor Cay. As it was, not knowing just where this might be located, he found it better to head back on the course which they had come and seek shelter behind Great Stirrup Cay which he knew could be at no great distance and on which he hoped to sight a lighthouse.

Leaving Larsen at the wheel, he went down into the engine room and told Fisher what he had decided, and asked if he thought they might count on the engines for three or four hours at the top notch without faltering.

"I think so, old chap," Fisher answered. "At any rate, it's the only thing to do. If you should try to run in and fail to hit your landfall on the nose, all hands of us would be in the broth before you could say knife. But if I were you I'd plug right out to windward, if you find you can make head against it, as there's no telling what our leeway might be."

This also was Larsen's advice. Like all sailors, he hated nothing as much as a lee shore. So the *Lotus* settled down to a long, steady grind into the teeth of the gale. For some time John Paul could not have told whether they were making any headway or not, but Larsen reported that they were, though this was very slight. The water was too deep to drop a drift lead, but the Swede's sea instinct and experience told him that they were unquestionably

gaining distance. What was more encouraging, the glass had started to rise, and although the force of the wind might be expected to increase, Larsen thought it likely that it would haul in the course of the day, which would remove the danger of the shoals under their lee.

It occurred to John Paul then that he had been rather rough with his hostess and, although he did not feel an apology to be in order under the circumstances, it would be no more than kind to reassure her fears about their immediate safety. So he went into the pretty saloon, where he found Evelyn crouched on a divan among a mass of silken cushions, and as she looked up at him he was, for the first time, struck by her feline traits. Heretofore she had been to him remarkable for the very absence of the catty quality to be found in so many women of luxurious or predatory natures. There had been, too, a steady levelness of gaze and a cool frankness of thought expressed in their many exchanges of ideas which had detached his mind, if not from her sex, at least from all association of many of its frailties.

He had come to think of her as a splendid feminine companion, and he had endowed her with a sort of semi-apotheosis as if she were a demigoddess, who might amuse herself in gay, human revelry without being in the least degraded by it. He had thought she possessed a calm and sound philosophy which might or might not be correct, but was at any rate consistent and sincere. Even her splendid physique had impressed him as rather superhuman, though at times, being very masculine, it thrilled him by its beauty.

His impression of her now was in the nature of a shock despite the fact of her picture having been so rudely changed, first by his learning of the cheap trickery to which she had lent

herself, then by her unheroic selfishness in forbidding that they run any risk for the saving of a boatload of human lives, and her fury at his refusal to obey her orders. To John Paul, what made this last revelation the more shocking was the very fact that he was convinced it had not been the result of panic or terror at their situation. She had not impressed him as being very much afraid. It was more as if she had coolly decided that the effort was not worth the risk, a good deal as a person might decide that it was not worth while to enter a burning house for the salvage of personal effects. He could have forgiven her the impulse of self-preservation, or cowardice, for that matter, but there had been a contemptuous cut to her voice in her reference to these unknown folk as a band of trippers of whom the aggregate value did not approach that of her own personal safety.

As his eyes now fell upon her, she looked at him precisely like that supreme egoist of the animal world, which is the cat. She resembled nothing so much as a beautiful, big cat in splendid fur, nestling sulkily in comfort and accepting a confinement which cannot be helped, with the stoicism of its species. Her eyes with their greenish tint, a little more pronounced in the gloom, rested on his as steadily as ever, and there was even the flicker of a smile upon her mobile lips as he stood there surveying her sternly.

"Well, John Paul," said she, "you are a good deal more of a man than I had thought."

"And you are a good deal more of a woman than I had thought, though not precisely the sort of woman I had classified you."

"Are we holding our own?" she asked almost indifferently.

"A little better than that," John Paul answered. "We are making slow headway and should be out of danger in a

couple of hours, if Fisher can keep his engines running full bore."

"Fisher appears to have his qualities, too," said Evelyn. She suppressed a little yawn. "Who'd ever have guessed it?"

John Paul sank wearily into a wicker chair.

"It sometimes takes a crisis to show up people for what they are," said he.

"Quite true," she admitted. "Since I am unmasked in all my glaring selfishness, I don't mind telling you that this escape of ours was all a fake."

John Paul raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed?" He gave a yawn himself.

Evelyn roused herself and leaned forward, dropping her hands on her knees.

"There was never any danger of a raid," said she. "I bribed our worthy Fisher to come off aboard and warn us. I wanted to commit you to my party beyond redemption. I had conceived a liking for you, John Paul, so I carried you off, a little in the fashion of an Amazon. I had better things in store for you than this."

"You could not possibly have had anything better in store for me than this," answered John Paul. "I have been permitted to assist in the saving of a good many lives. Heretofore I had bungled at trying merely to save souls."

"Well," said Evelyn, "you must at least admit that I hauled you out of the breakers of a pretty awful state of nervous prostration and collapse and set you on your feet again."

"Freely admitted," said John Paul, "and please don't think me lacking in gratitude and all due acknowledgment. You gave me the one treatment needed at the time."

"And the beauty of it is," said Evelyn, "that through this unanticipated anticlimax, the treatment is not apt to do you any harm."

3—Ains.

"On the contrary," said John Paul, "it has put me back where I belong, without any insidious after effects. It has restored my faith in former ideas, or ideals, which I carried to a point of excess. More than that, I believe that there is a good deal to be said for your own system, though I think that you also carry that to a dangerous excess."

A wave of color came into her face.

"Well, now, John Paul, I think that is very decent of you," said she. "Then you don't harbor any ill will?"

"None whatever, Evelyn," said he. "Through my own ignorance of femininity, I stuck you up on an ivory tower in the middle of a quicksand. I thought you were a sort of oracle, a sibyl, a high priestess of pleasure in the abstract, but I find you now to be merely a very beautiful and kindly, if selfish and pampered, woman."

"Thanks for the beautiful part of it, John Paul. But I can say rather more for you. I should say that this was rather a splendid thing that you and Fisher have managed to accomplish. When I looked back and saw those breakers so close, I couldn't believe it possible to succeed."

"Sorry I had to handle you so roughly," muttered John Paul.

Her eyes glowed at him through the murk.

"Sometimes a woman likes to be handled roughly, my dear. It's worth it, if only to bring back a rather poor opinion of manhood. This thing ought to go far toward reinstating you in the public opinion."

John Paul made a gesture of disgust.

"I don't care anything about that," said he, "but I intend that you shall get full credit, Evelyn."

"For what?"

"For what you would have done, but for your wrong sense of values. Our little difference of opinion is known to no one but ourselves, and need not be known by any other."

She leaned forward eagerly and laid her hand on his arm.

"Would you really do that?" she asked.

"Of course I shall," he answered. "Such a *beau geste* on the part of a woman like yourself is a good thing for the public morale. Besides, I think you merely lost your head for a second and thought we were foolishly throwing ourselves away in a vain effort and you had your three girls to consider. Let us assume that I am right."

Evelyn drew a deep breath. She was quick to appreciate the réclame, the enormous credit to be reaped from such a deed as this. A knowledge of publicity, its ways and means, was flashed from the professional facet of her active-mind. She could visualize the columns in the country's press. "Mrs. Evelyn Ord, the famous authoress, a Grace Darling," and the flamboyant, yet actually truthful, description of how in a smothering gale, while making the run to Nassau in her full-powered house boat, she had gone to the rescue of a disabled passenger steamer and plucked it out of the very maw of the breakers at imminent risk of sharing its fate. And she knew that her glory would lack nothing from the testimony of those aboard the rescued craft.

As all of this swept through her brain, she stared at John Paul with glowing eyes which presently sank before his own direct and thoughtful gaze.

"You've taught me a lot, John Paul," she muttered.

"It has been a fair exchange, I think, Evelyn. I'll say right now that I think your free-thought, free-acting, free-indulgence, free-loving theories are all wrong. But so, also, do I believe my own extreme censorship of all that you believe in carrying on to have been no less wrong. Hereafter I shall leave the regulation of the public morals and conduct to the conscience of the individual

and confine myself strictly to trying to help those who suffer from the lack of a normal conscience, just as one might suffer from the lack of normal physical health."

Evelyn drew closer with a moisture in her eyes and a note in her throaty voice which was perhaps the first truly honest one to accent it for many years.

"Oh, my dear," she cried, "then can you begin by helping me?"

But at that moment, the door to the wheelhouse opened and the voice of Larsen interrupted, as it had at other crucial moments between these two.

"Der vind is shiftin', zir," said he. "I ban tink it tryin' to clear."

CHAPTER VIII.

The stalwart quartermaster proved to be correct. The short, cyclonic gale was breaking almost as rapidly as it had swept down upon them. The sand was scattering to dissipate in smutty fringes and a band of clear blue sky appeared in the northwest.

But still the wind blew hard, though from a clearing quarter, and the *Lotus*, pitching and flinging the spray from her bluff bows, plodded doggedly ahead for the more open water.

Then, about two hours later, there came from astern another series of short staccato blasts from the little steamer in tow, and a moment later the house boat seemed to gather speed as if in great measure relieved of her cumbersome drag. John Paul, looking out astern, saw that she was taking a slight sheer, and at the same moment Fisher, haggard of face, but jubilant of countenance, came up from his carefully nursed charges.

"What's this?" he cried. "Have they got her going again?"

"They must have," said John Paul. "She's lightened the strain on the hawser and seems to be working up on our quarter."

Larsen suddenly appeared on the forward deck.

"I ban tink dey got her turnin' over and vant us to cast off, zir," he bawled.

"Very well," John Paul called, "then cast her off."

Larsen made his way aft. John Paul stepped into the saloon and roused Evelyn who was dozing on a divan. She looked up with a flushed face and raised both hands to thrust back her tumbled hair.

"Our guest has found herself again," said John Paul. "You might come up on deck to answer their acknowledgments."

Rather dazed, she obeyed. John Paul helped her up on to the top of the cabin house, Fisher being meantime at the wheel. Clinging to the awning stanchions, they watched Larsen cast the hawser off the quarter bitts, when it was hauled in by the deck hands of the steamer, now most evidently under her own power and forging up abeam.

The wind was roaring from the northwest, but despite its force, greater if anything than before, an entirely different aspect lay upon the face of the tormented waters. This was because the sun had blazed out suddenly and swept that troubled waste with such a deluge of color as to stagger the eyes. The indigo of the Gulf Stream smeared with its rifts of snowy foam, with its myriad effects of rainbow, seemed now rejoicing in a sort of boisterous gayety where not long before it had worn all the sullen aspects of violent death. On the horizon spouting waves were in a frenzy of dance revel, flung in one direction by the swell and tossed back in another by the blast of the new wind.

And this mad, but joyful turmoil was enhanced by the aspect of the late victim of this war between the elements. The little steamer, which they had encountered so sadly stricken, presented now an almost jaunty aspect, with

bright paintwork glistening in the sunshine and the snowy steam contrasting with the black smoke pouring from her stack. She plunged up valiantly as closely as she dared and slightly to windward. Her reversed ensign had been reset, and from the groups clinging to her rail came the wavings of flags and handkerchiefs and hats and scarfs, anything at hand with which those so shortly redeemed from death might signal their glad deliverance and frenzied gratitude.

Close aboard, a man in her wheelhouse leveled a megaphone and his stentorian voice distinctly reached the ears of John Paul and his companion.

"We — can — now — proceed — to Miami," it called. "Can—you—stand —by?"

John Paul signaled an affirmative. The clear voice began again.

"You — have — saved — sixty-three lives—from—certain — death. God — bless—you!"

Evelyn burst into a storm of tears, waving frantically. There came three blasts of the whistle and the little steamer began to swing off on its course. Fisher, who had heard the request, swung the *Lotus* in after her. John Paul looked at Evelyn with glowing eyes.

"I think," said he, "that when we get to Miami you will have to hide out for a while. Those people are apt to eat you up."

Evelyn got herself under control.

"You had better look out for yourself, John Paul," said she.

"No," said John Paul, "I think I'll go back to my old job of trying to look out for other people. Not their morals, but their lives. I think I'm more of a success at that sort of work."

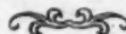
Larsen called up from beneath.

"Mr. Fisher ban fall asleep, zir," said he. "I tink I better vatch der engines und you tak der vheel."



"Hello, Marcia!"

By Meade Minnigerode
Author of "The Big Year"



CHAPTER I.

MARCIA, my dear," said Mrs. Blagden, "please tell my husband to announce the next festive event, will you, and let's get on with the rat killing!"

Now if the young person in the green bathing suit with the purple-and-orange stripes had said that, it would probably have sounded rather vulgar, but from the lips of Sarah Blagden it came gracefully and becomingly, and, as usual, with a perfect hitting of nails on the head.

For there was really no better way of describing the process of herding a score or so of skinnily exuberant youngsters of both sexes through the program of tub races and umbrella races and egg-and-spoon races in which they were all engaged on one of the hottest afternoons of the year.

"It all comes under the head of pleasure, I can see that," Mr. Blagden had observed when they made him chairman of the committee. "Like climbing mountains and going to Coney Island. I won't do it!"

"We start at two," his wife informed him, ignoring the latter part of his statement. "On account of the tide, the children must be amused, and what could be safer and saner than water sports? Give the life guards something to do!"

"And keep us out in the open sunshine!" he growled. "Well, I suppose I must be sacrificed to make a national

holiday. And they'll make me pay for the prizes, too, I dare say."

So they proceeded with the rat killing. Of course, no one but Sarah Blagden would have thought of expressing it in just that way, from the center of the publicity surrounding the judges' tent at the Greenchester Fourth of July Water Sports, even in these years of demobilized habits, when flippancy of vocabulary is still supposed to connote a close familiarity with military affairs. These years in which sailors may still be referred to as "gobs," and in which you are earnestly entitled to "snap out of it" when you have failed to return your partner's lead; these years which see the slow, reluctant death of "Let's go," "I'll say she does," and "Toot Sweet."

To be sure, Sarah Blagden's whimsicalities of speech were not the result of an acquired vocabulary. She was forty-seven, and the great lady of Greenchester, and she had little use for such modernities.

"My daughter, Virginia, is much more versed than I am in such matters," she would confess. "She invited me to come down and 'put on the old nose bag' the other afternoon! I supposed, of course, she was referring to gas masks or some such trophy, but it seems that she had the consumption of food in mind!"

Virginia was twelve, and she assimilated phrases the way a goat swallows paper, as her mother said of her.

And between them they were getting through the crowded afternoon somehow, in spite of the loose sand in their shoes and the relentlessly receding tide—Mrs. Blagden and her white sunshade, and young Dicky Stark, forever paddling in from the float with his perplexed queries.

"Oh, Mrs. Blagden! Mrs. Blagden!"

"Yoo-hoo! Yes, Richard?"

"What was the name of that red-headed girl in the blue bathing suit who won the second heat of the egg-and-spoon race?"

"My dear boy, how should I know?" Mrs. Blagden called back to him. "They all look exactly alike to me; some of them are skinnier than others, that's all. Have her paged, why don't you?"

"There she is down there, see—no, dancing around on one foot with Patricia Ransom. Yes, that one."

"Oh, *that* one! A wise mother knows her own child at least. That's my daughter Virginia."

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I should have known."

"I don't see why you should. I didn't even know she was in that event. You want to watch her in the finals; she's full of tricks, is Virginia."

"Oh, she'll beat them all! She seems to be a whiz at it."

"Well, she's been practicing it in the bathroom at home, I know for a fact. I couldn't imagine where our eggs were disappearing to. Does that affect her amateur standing?"

"Oh, I guess not!"

And there was Mr. Blagden, with his cigar, and his megaphone, and his old Panama hat with the Groton School team hatband, genial and smiling, in the midst of a gesticulating swarm of shrill Tommies and Jackies and Mollies and Susans.

"Mister Blagden—Mister Blagden—Mister Blagden!"

"Yes, in a minute."

"Can't we start now? Did you put me down for the fancy diving? Do I get a prize for the tub race?"

"Yes, in a minute—in a minute—in a minute!"

And there was Philip Blagden, tall and handsome under his sunburn, pulling children out of overturned barrels, inspecting hooks and buttons in the harlequin race, borrowing innumerable matches for that black pipe of his, and avoiding all questions with a noncommittal wave of his hands.

"Ask dad, he knows!" he would reply smilingly.

"You're about as much use as Marcelline, and not half as funny!" his mother said to him once.

"That's me all over!" he grinned back at her. "Shake your feet, old lady, and let's pull out of this!"

And then there was Marcia, little Marcia Crane, as people were in the habit of thinking of her, although actually she was quite tall and never inconspicuous. Some one had once said of her that she walked like the Winged Victory, and there can never have been anything inconspicuous about that lady.

But still people thought of her as little Marcia, and they were inclined to treat her as a child, for all her twenty-odd years. This was due primarily to her face, her delicate child's face, with the big round eyes and the drooping little mouth, under the mop of yellow ringlets which shook so when she laughed.

"Marcia Crane's face," some very unkind person once remarked, "looks like the beginning of a perfect day. I mean she registers every known virtue. Can she possibly be as good as she looks?"

"Well, I don't know," came the no less unkind reply. "She has a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead, and you know what that means!"

"Oh, yes!"

"She stood on her head, on her little trundle-bed,
With nobody by for to hinder;
She screamed and she squalled,
She yelled and she bawled,
And drummed her little heels against the winder."

"Maybe Marcia Crane goes off by herself and has tantrums just to make up for her fluffy hair and her little baby-doll's face!"

If she did, there were never any indications of her having done so, nor indications of any desire on her part to attempt such a thing. She was as quiet and demure a little miss as could be found in all Greenchester, and therein, perhaps, rather than in her appearance, lay the secret of her effect on people.

It was her manner which made them call her little Marcia and smile at her with the gentle tolerance with which one greets the dainty precocities of a graceful child. It was her way of receiving the slightest kindness as though it were the most unexpected favor, her habit of rendering services to older people without for a moment seeming to detract from their ability to help themselves, her trick of listening to others when she might easily have compelled attention for herself.

"That child has the most exquisite manners," Mrs. Blagden said of her. "Everything she does is like an old-fashioned curtsey. Now everything my daughter Virginia does is like a poke in the jaw!"

And then there was something else about Marcia which set her apart, even on so eminently conservative a beach as that of the Greenchester Club.

"You know how it is in Greenchester," said Dicky Stark who was fond of misquoting:

"In Greenchester their skins are white,
They bathe by day, they bathe by night,
The women there do all they ought,
The men observe the rules of thought.
Ah, me! To see the sand fleas stir
Across the beach of Greenchester!"

For, of course, the young person in the green bathing suit with the purple-and-orange stripes was merely a bird of passage, although equally conservative, no doubt, on her own beach. The bird of paradise is probably not remarked upon in its own jungle.

Marcia Crane went out of her way to shun the artificialities of dress and demeanor indulged in by some of her contemporaries, and practiced for no other purpose apparently than that of ensnaring the elusive male.

She enjoyed a good time as much as any one else, and she was enormously popular with girls of her own age, and, of course, she made no bones at all about the fact that the Crane finances did not permit of her following the strictest dictates of fashion. But aside from that Marcia shrank from certain extravagances which other girls seemed to find indispensable, and preferred to present her features to the world devoid of additional adornment other than that furnished by the touch of wind and sun.

"I suppose you wear your hair down over your ears to keep from catching cold," she remarked naively in the ladies' dressing room one evening at a dance.

"No, little Snow White, that's not the reason," Mary Ransom laughed. "It's because we have to." And then she whispered something in Marcia's ear which set her blushing all the rest of the evening!

At all events little Marcia Crane was a model of simplicity and decorum, and throughout that entire "rat-killing" business on the beach that afternoon she had not even looked once at Philip Blagden, all the time that Mary Ransom and some of her companions had been haranguing him with eloquent glances.

Which was perhaps one reason why that young man had noticed none of them, except Marcia.

"Well, thank heavens, that's all over!" Mr. Blagden exclaimed after the last prize had been distributed. He was very frankly mopping his brow with an enormous silk handkerchief. "And on the mere the wailing dies away. The Fourth of July Water Sports committee will now dine on the top veranda at the expense of the governors of the Greenchester Club!"

"And what could be fairer than that?" asked Mrs. Blagden, "seeing that you are a governor yourself? Richard, you'll stay, of course. Marcia, you don't have to go, do you?"

"Oh, really, Mrs. Blagden, I think I'd better be going home—thank you ever so much, but mother will be expecting me."

"Nonsense, my dear child. Of course you'll stay, and we'll drop you at your house when we go in after the fireworks. You can't miss the fireworks, you know. They're the only thing that makes a day like this livable."

"What's she arguing about?" smiled Philip. "Of course she'll stay, and we'll sing afterward while they're shooting off the rockets, won't we, Marcia?"

"Well, if you really insist, Mrs. Blagden," Marcia agreed. "It's awfully kind of you to ask me, and I'd love to stay, of course, if there's room for me."

"Why, of course there is, my dear child! You can help me pacify Virginia who usually goes into conniptions over the noisy ones."

"I think I'll telephone mother, though, if you'll excuse me."

"Better use the booth in the dressing room," Dicky Stark reminded her. "The main booth is out of order, as usual. You've got one on the ladies' side, haven't you, same as we have?"

"Yes," Marcia replied. "I think they face each other. Sometimes you can hear people talking through the partition."

"That's a good thing to know," laughed Philip. "Thanks for the tip!"

"Arthur," Mrs. Blagden said to her husband, watching Marcia as she went down the beach on her way to the clubhouse—Philip and Richard had gone off together to take a swim before dinner—"I wonder if they wouldn't hit it off pretty well, those two."

"What two?" asked Mr. Blagden. "My dear Sarah, what are you doing?"

"I'm taking the sand out of my shoes, that's all. Don't be alarmed, my dear, my stockings are quite presentable!"

"What two?" he repeated. "And what are they going to hit? Don't ask me conundrums on a hot day."

"Philip and Marcia," Mrs. Blagden explained, wiggling her liberated toes.

"Oh, you do!" remarked her husband. "I should think it might be something for them to decide for themselves."

"Well, obviously, if they don't like each other they won't get married. But sometimes a little outside encouragement does wonders. She's such a quiet little mouse, half the time you don't know she's there at all, and you know how Philip is."

"No, how is Philip? My dear, Mrs. Ransom is observing your antics with something approaching disfavor."

"Isn't that too bad! Philip's awfully slow about things like that. He might see her like this on the beach every day for a year, and be immensely fond of her, and it would never occur to him to ask her to marry him."

"Well, what of it?" said Mr. Blagden. "It's his own affair, it seems to me."

"Well, no, it isn't exactly. Because in the meantime some little fool like Mary Ransom will be dancing sarabands around him until he asks *her* to marry him so as not to hurt her feel-

ings. Didn't you notice her this afternoon?"

"No, I can't say that I did. My attention was very largely concentrated on your abominable handwriting."

"It's your own fault. I told you to have the lists typed."

"Well, be that as it may—which of the various diving beauties was she?"

"That tall, dark-haired vamp in the brown sweater, you know, Patricia Ransom's older sister. She's always smiling from ear to ear to show off her teeth. I never could stand any of the Ransoms, anyway. Well, my dear, she never took her eyes off Philip once during the entire performance."

"I didn't notice the boy straining his eyes looking at her!" laughed Mr. Blagden. "I thought he seemed rather taken with Marcia, to tell the truth, only he's so reserved lately that you never do know what he is thinking."

"Well, that's just it. I think he is taken with Marcia, but she'd never stir an eyelash to get him; she's not that sort. And he's such a big, modest silly it will never dawn on him that any girl could care enough for him to marry him until some girl practically tells him so. And Mary Ransom won't wait for leap year to do that, mark my words!"

"Aren't you making Philip out to be a good deal of a fool?"

"All men are fools when it comes to girls," announced Mrs. Blagden. "In one way or another. On the whole, I think I prefer Philip's brand of folly."

"What do you think you are going to do about it?"

"Oh, I don't know! I think if they should be thrown together, and he had a chance really to see a good deal of Marcia that everything would go very nicely. They've known each other—for years as far as that goes, and I know he used to like her quite a lot."

"Marcia has probably other fish to fry; they say the sea is full of them!"

"I don't think so. I don't believe

she's ever had an affair of that sort. She's never gone around much, you know; the Cranes couldn't afford it."

"Well, I think you're simply playing with fire," her husband warned her. "Much better let them settle it among themselves."

"No, I'm not playing with fire. I'm simply wondering whether the hearth can't be swept up a bit so the fire has a chance to draw. I'd like Marcia to have as good a chance as that Ransom girl, for instance, because I like Marcia, and I think Philip likes her, and if he should want to marry her I, personally, would be delighted."

"Oh, Marcia is a very dear girl! I agree with you."

"Yes, she's a very dear girl, and she's just the girl for Philip. I'm not delirious about the rest of the Cranes, but they're nice people, and as for Marcia herself, there isn't a sweeter, simpler, more wholesome girl in all Green-

chester."

"My dear Sarah!" Mr. Blagden ex-

claimed. "What an awful thing to say

about a girl! Wholesome! Might

think she was a breakfast food!"

"You ought to know me, Arthur Blagden. When I use a word like that I mean it. And I don't know but what a man's wife and his breakfast food have a good deal in common at that. He's got to start every day of his life with both of them staring him in the face."

"Well, what's this idea of yours going to cost me?"

"Nothing, silly!" laughed his wife. "You won't even know there's anything going on. I'm just going to take little Marcia Crane under my wing, and see that she gets a fair show."

"You'll be wasting your time, trying to hatch out a china egg, I'm telling you!"

"Well, my stars and garters! If nothing comes of it as far as Philip is concerned, at least I can have the sail-

faction of doing something for that child. I know her mother can't afford to, and if I want to play fairy godmother to her in a mild way, I don't see what's to stop me."

"I thought you said this idea of yours wasn't going to cost me anything!"

"My dear Arthur, I don't believe a pumpkin chariot or two, or even a pair of glass slippers will make much of an impression on your exchequer. I'm going to spend time on her, not money."

"But my dear, you forget, time is money!"

"I don't think that's a bit funny," Sarah Blagden smiled.

"And in the meantime, that dear, sweet, wholesome child, demure little Marcia Crane, with her simple ways and her innocent face, had been telephoning to her mother.

And while she did not "stand on her head on her little trundle-bed" nor "drum her little heels against the window," still there was that in her speech which would have startled the whole of Greenchester, and if some, Mary Ransom, for instance, would have laughed, others would have sighed at it. Sarah Blagden for her part would have probably plunged into frank profanity.

A little weary note in her voice, so that you would have listened twice to make sure it was Marcia Crane's; a little defiantly worldly tone, to match the sudden hardness of her mouth which made her appear anything but childlike; and then the pitiful callousness of the things which she was dropping, like the ugly toads of a fairy story, into the telephone, after having carefully listened to make sure that she was alone. *

"Hello—hello! Yes. That you, mother? This is Marcia. I'm at the club. . . . Yes, pretty well. . . . Made quite a hit with her I think. . . . Hardly a word. . . . No, did just as

you said. Didn't look at him all afternoon. . . . Well, I don't know. He didn't pay any attention to Mary Ransom, I know that. I'm dining with them here and staying for the fireworks. . . . Yes, just the Blagdens, and Dicky Stark, and I—What's that? Be careful of what? . . . Oh, Dicky Stark! No, I won't. They're bringing me back in the car afterward. Look here, tell Loomis I can't promise, but if he comes over for the fireworks I think I can probably manage for him to come back with me in their car. He'll have to sort of stick around because I can't very well ask them to do it. Tell him to brush his hair nicely. . . . Yes, good-by."

Marcia hung up the receiver and stepped out of the booth. Her little drooping mouth had fallen back into its usual curve, her big round eyes were as clear as a summer's evening.

"Isn't it easy to be horrid?" she laughed mirthlessly to herself. "Well let's get on with the rat killing!"

CHAPTER II.

"My dear child," Marcia's mother had said to her several days before, "it's the chance of a lifetime!"

This argument had started at once upon the receipt of Mrs. Blagden's letter notifying Marcia that she had been appointed to serve on the Water Sports committee, a circumstance in which Mrs. Crane had immediately seen far-reaching possibilities which she was now endeavoring to elucidate to her daughter.

"And what do you mean by that, in words of one syllable?" Marcia asked.

"In words of one syllable, or very nearly, I mean that if you can't manage things from now on so as to make young Blagden marry you, you're not as clever as I thought you were, that's all!"

"And what a calamity that would

be!" Marcia laughed. "You have to be clever in this family—there's no provision for fools in our budget, is there?"

"No. We are obliged to deny ourselves that luxury, I'm afraid."

It was all perfectly cold-blooded from the beginning. Everything about the Crane family was cold-blooded. It had to be, when there were never enough things to go around except arguments, and when the temporary enjoyment of a facility was dependent upon the material advantages to be derived for the lot of them from its use at just that time and in just that way by the claimant of the moment.

This was true not only of definite, concrete objects, such as a petticoat, or a suit case, or a dollar bill, but also of such abstractions as personal liberty, independence of motive, and private conceptions of what might constitute individual happiness, were such a thing even remotely attainable.

And, of course, as Adele Crane had once said:

"A fool in a family like ours would be worse than a fat man playing the concertina in a derelict lifeboat!"

A fat man playing the concertina would have been bad enough anywhere, but in a derelict lifeboat there are more immediately important things to be done with one's hands.

So in the Crane family ship. It took a certain superiority of mind to wear the same gown over and over again for instance, and create an impression of newness at each display, or to make the solitary bottle of milk do the duty of two. These subterfuges occur in every household, but in the Crane family they were the beginning, nooning, and ending of each recurring day. That they succeeded so well simply reflects vast credit on the Cranes.

And it took a quite unusual degree of perspicacity to realize the necessity for the almost constant surrender of

the abstractions which must be practiced. A fool, of course, would have preferred personal liberty to subservience to the chance knocking of an opportunity, independence of motive to the successful maintenance of a pretense, and private conceptions of happiness to the vague generalities of a temporary common advantage.

But there were no fools in the Crane family, except possibly Roscoe Crane himself, and his greatest folly, after all, consisted in his ever having been responsible for the family in the first place. On the other hand, wisdom was his to the extent that he never argued with his wife, nor interfered in any way with the machinations of his three children, Marcia, Adele, and Loomis.

He had been for many years the editor of the Greenchester *Weekly Mirror*, although at one time he had hoped to become an engineer. That had been a very long while ago, and the juxtaposition of those two facts alone furnishes the index to his career. His favorite relaxations were the manipulation of a doleful flute, which he played not beautifully, but too often, and the perusal of detective stories.

A baffling murder mystery in the public prints, filled with women in black, and reticent housekeepers, and missing taxicab chauffeurs, kept him contented for weeks, during which time the temptation to write elucidating letters to the district attorney usually proved too great for him. He never played his flute as well as when his mind was engrossed with the details of some such fascinating problem.

Roscoe Crane was untidy. Roscoe Crane was a middle-aged failure. Roscoe Crane played the flute.

Mrs. Crane disregarded him utterly, and in that one respect at least her three children followed her example unanimously. Of them all he preferred Marcia, because she was perhaps the least inclined to do so. An ill-disposed

observer of the Crane family circle would probably have said that Marcia was kind to her father.

"Why should Philip Blagden marry me?" Marcia had asked finally.

They were sitting in the living room of the little house at Greenchester which was their only solid asset. The little house which managed to look so neat and white outside, and was so utterly cheerless and disappointing inside.

"The little whitened sepulcher," Adele called it. Adele was eighteen and rather plain, so that she had found it advisable to cultivate a reputation for disagreeable witticisms. At all events her observations were frequently disagreeable. They were perhaps less frequently witty.

But it was undeniably true that the house seemed to reflect the laboriously contrived pretenses of its inmates. As a house it was as much of a hopeless failure as was its owner as a member of the community. The confusion of its unlovely rear approaches belied the promise of its expensively painted façade, and was the ultimate cost of that expenditure. Just as whatever of ease and prosperity there might be in the front exhibited to the world by the family was achieved at the cost of its soul.

The kitchen, the cupboards, the rooms in which they arose to face each new day, were a constant betrayal of jealously guarded makeshifts, more noticeable perhaps to the occupants with their monotonous familiarity than they could have been to the outside gaze which never penetrated their unkempt corners.

The dining room, to which visitors must needs be admitted on occasions, had never quite lost its look of having just been transplanted from the window display of a department store. And the living room, in which no one really lived, because they were all too

busy scheming to live, was always filled with untidy things which must be hastily pushed out of sight should some one come unexpectedly to the front door.

It was a terrible house, rendered more terrible by the smiling hypocrisy of its little lawn, and its few trees, and its swing. All of the children had been born in it.

"Well, at least it's a roof over our heads," Marcia would say.

"Yes, and a door to keep the wolf away from," her sister would retort. "I wish the man who wrote 'Home Sweet Home' had lived here! There certainly is no place like this."

"Never mind, we own it, and it's one of the few things we do own! Don't kick the hearth that's heating you. And it's in Greenchester, don't forget that."

Yes, it was in Greenchester. A little out of the fashionable orbit, perhaps, but still in-Greenchester. "Old Greenchester," meaning that portion of the village which was not situated upon, nor even closely adjacent to, the Sound. The house had been there, with the Cranes in it, quite some time before Greenchester had become the smart Connecticut residential colony which it now took pride in being. The Cranes could not have afforded to live there otherwise.

"Yes, indeed, we're quite among the oldest inhabitants," Mrs. Crane was fond of saying. She was quite fond of saying a number of things in public which she knew to be hollow mockeries. "We've watched Greenchester grow up house by house almost, Mr. Crane and I, until now you would hardly notice our little home tucked away in a corner. But we're very much attached to it."

"Oh, yes, indeed, like a monkey to its cage!" Adele would say afterward.

But there was no denying the social value of Greenchester, if only from the standpoint of its geographical prestige. As you passed through it on the train,

or followed the caprices of its solitary traffic policeman in a car, and caught a glimpse of its town hall, and its flagpole, and its rather ornate roll of honor, and saw its street filled with sweater-coated young women who drive their own cars to market, with the children and the dogs all piled up together on the front seat, you knew at once that Greenchester was a place.

A place as well as a village. One of those places which make American country life the grand community house party that it is.

The Cranes of Greenchester—it fell on the ear with a certain hint of lawns and shrubberies, a soft purring of upholstered touring cars, an aroma of chicken à la king.

"It comes with a thick odor of burning money. As you might say the Washingtons of Mount Vernon!" Adele again.

"Why should Philip Blagden marry me?" Marcia asked a second time.

"Why should he?" her mother replied. "Because he's the sort of boy who will marry the first girl who crosses his path."

"After they are married to one, that sort usually want to marry the *next* girl who crosses their path, too, don't they? I mean, it's a perpetual 'Hello, why didn't I see *you* before performance,' isn't it?"

"Don't be silly, Marcia. What do you know about it? And it wouldn't be so with him in any case; he's not that sort."

"No, I suppose not. Philip Blagden is a rather nice person. He'd stick to any bargain he made."

"I'm very glad you think so. The point is this—he's never looked twice at a girl in his life."

"Oh, come! He's probably looked at lots of them."

"I didn't say he hadn't. I said he had never looked *twice* at any of them.

Not even during the years when he was in college. And the young man of that age is usually very much occupied telling one girl after another what a splendid person he is, and rushing at least two of them at once."

"The process is called 'salting away a couple of smelts' now, I am informed," smiled Marcia.

"Well, whatever the process may be called, and I can't pretend to keep up with the intricacies of undergraduate English, you never saw young Blagden indulging in it. And you never see him going around with girls now, or to parties much, or anything of that sort."

"He's very popular with men though. He was on the Yale crew, and he belonged to everything there was in college. He simply doesn't like girls, I suppose."

"He doesn't like most of the girls he sees because they fly after him with butterfly nets and try to stick pins into him. It was bad enough before on account of his good looks and his money, but now that he's come back from France with a croix de guerre and a wound stripe they trip all over his feet. And that's not the way to catch Philip Blagden."

"What do I have to do, creep up on him?" laughed Marcia. She and her mother understood each other very well as a rule.

"Another reason," Mrs. Crane went on, "why he doesn't care for girls particularly is because his family has doted on him so that he's never had to turn anywhere else to look for amusement or companionship. 'Blagden Place,' and his car, and his boat, and now his office, have kept him thoroughly occupied."

"Then what makes you think he'll jump at the chance of marrying me?" asked Marcia. She was really not taking this conversation very seriously yet.

"I don't. Not you personally, Marcia

Crane. In fact, the thought would probably not occur to him now in a month of Sundays. But the time will come when Philip Blagden will want to marry. It will be very soon probably, now that he's settled down. He's the domestic kind."

"Well?"

"When that time comes he will marry the first person who comes to his mind, the person he's used to seeing around, the person he's accustomed to—and quite incidentally, and I think unconsciously—the person his mother approves of."

"Oh, I'm not so sure about the last part!" said Marcia. "Philip's got a will of his own. At least he had as a boy."

"Well, maybe so. But the first part is true, and if you are that person, he will marry you."

"Oh, I see! How very simple!"

"Perfectly. He's known you for years, ever since you were urchins together on the beach, when they first came up here and built Blagden Place, nearly twenty years ago. You have a certain claim to good looks, for which thank fortune! You swim and play golf; you are rather clever about your clothes—"

"I have a sweet nature!"

"Yes, my dear, I think you have—at least not like Adele who thinks it's clever to be disagreeable. You know how to be glib about current events, and books, and politics, and most of the minor forms of insanity with which society amuses itself at present."

"I don't go in for roulette playing, though," objected Marcia.

"I sometimes think, my dear, that the things you *don't* go in for are your greatest asset. When I look at some of the other girls of your age I see around here, perfectly nice girls, who always seem to forget that men seldom marry the girls they take to roof gar-

dens, I am very glad you don't go in much for that style."

"Why, Mrs. Grundy!"

"Oh, I'm not preaching to you, Marcia, and I should hesitate, I think, to stand in the way of anything that gave you pleasure! You've had precious little of it in your life. But since you've chosen to be rather different from most of the others, I'm very glad of it. And it suits your rather frail appearance exactly."

"I think it suits my rather frail pocketbook primarily," Marcia exclaimed rather bluntly. "I found out some time ago that the only way to make my gingham gowns attractive was to fill them with calico manners. I wonder sometimes why I don't bite the people who pat me on the cheek and call me little Marcia!"

Mrs. Crane sighed and looked out of the window at the swing in which no one ever sat, before replying. It was seldom that her older daughter betrayed any sign of the rebellion at her mode of life which must be constantly in her mind. Now Adele was forever nagging and complaining, but Adele, of course, lacked Marcia's extraordinary knack for making the best of things.

"Well, my dear," she said finally, "whether from conviction or from necessity, you've done it very successfully. And it only makes you all the more the person for Philip Blagden."

"I see." For perhaps the first time Marcia began to realize that her mother was quite in earnest about all this.

"I think this invitation is a big feather in your cap. You would never have received it if Mrs. Blagden didn't like you, and now if she really takes to you, you have your chance, if you use it right."

"If I use it right?"

"Yes. A door has been opened which you ought to be able to keep from having closed again. And then if you are on the spot when the time

comes, before you know it, he will ask you to marry him."

"I understand," said Marcia. "Well now, that's all very interesting, I dare say. But we seem to be overlooking just one thing, don't we?"

"What?"

"Why—why should *I* marry Philip Blagden?"

Mrs. Crane sighed again. It was not as easy to explain with Marcia there in front of her as it had seemed earlier that morning with nothing but another dreary day before her. It would have been easier perhaps if Marcia had told her the reasons why she should not marry Philip Blagden instead of asking her to explain why she should.

"Well, my dear," she replied, "since you ask me that, there are two reasons. The one concerns you, personally, and the other concerns us all. I—I must confess it's not very easy to tell you either of them."

"I understand, mother," said Marcia. "But I think I'd better hear them. I'm sure you wouldn't undertake to tell me if they weren't very good reasons."

"Yes, I'm afraid they are very good reasons."

"Well, let's begin at the beginning. How does it concern me personally?"

"Simply that in marrying Philip Blagden you would be marrying a very fine, young fellow, who will do everything in his power to make you happy. I don't think there would be any question about that."

"I'm sure of it," Marcia agreed.

"And you would be providing yourself with a very delightful, comfortable home, and surrounding yourself, not with luxuries necessarily, but with the ordinary amenities of life—which neither your father nor I have ever been able to give you."

"At a price," murmured Marcia.

"Well, everything in this world has to be obtained at a price. When all is

said and done would the price to be paid for what young Blagden has to offer be so great? You have known him almost all your life. You do like him a great deal, don't you?"

"Philip and I have always gotten on very well together—yes."

"You can be sure that he will be perfectly devoted to the girl he marries. After all, I'm not suggesting that you become the wife of a stranger for whom you have no sympathy whatever."

"I don't know but what that might be an easier thing to do," Marcia remarked. "It must always be more satisfactory to hang for a sheep than for a lamb!"

"For a girl in your position," Mrs. Crane continued, "marriage is the only hope of salvation—a good marriage. A girl with very little social position and no money whatever cannot afford to be sentimental. I suppose that sounds terribly cold-blooded, but I speak from experience. I allowed myself to be sentimental when I married your father. Yes; does that surprise you? You would never imagine it, I suppose, to see us now!"

Marcia said nothing at all, and her mother looked out of the window for a while.

"It might have been different," she said at last, "if we had not been born to a belief in the necessity for keeping up appearances. That necessity is even greater now than it was twenty years ago."

"Only now it's very often the necessity for keeping up with other people's appearances," Marcia smiled. "It's the Blagdens and the Ransoms and all the rest of them who set the styles in Greenchester which we all break our necks to follow. Living would be simple enough here if it weren't for them. We were here first—why should we copy them?"

"Why, indeed? But we do, and we

always will. And they are probably copying some one else themselves."

"Good heavens!" Marcia exclaimed. "Do you suppose any one is copying us?"

"I suppose so," her mother admitted. "And envying us probably. But as I was saying—blind, improvident sentimentality in marriage is an endless mistake without something solid back of it, unless you are prepared deliberately to give up trying to keep up appearances and very few people ever have the courage to do that."

"It's a form of suicide, I suppose," Marcia suggested. "Instead of destroying life you would be destroying a standard."

"Possibly. But the sentimental marriage entered into in poverty and continued in drudgery is a living death. It's not fair to either the husband or the wife unless they are rather extraordinarily constituted. And what is of infinitely more importance, it's not fair to the children who will grow up to face even more difficult conditions of life. And there usually are children."

"The alternative, then, is a good marriage?" asked Marcia.

"My dear, it's hardly an alternative. It's a necessity. You have no choice. I suppose the sordidness of what I am saying is my punishment for having brought you into the world when I could not possibly hope to provide for you. You and Adele. Loomis is a boy and will have a better chance."

"And a marriage with Philip Blagden would be a good marriage, would it?"

"You could not hope for a better. Philip Blagden can give you everything—security, peace of mind, comfort, freedom from drudgery and care, and, I think, a chance for very real happiness."

"Security, peace of mind, comfort, freedom from drudgery and care, and,

you think, a chance for very real happiness," Marcia repeated. "What—what is the second reason you mentioned?"

It seemed to Mrs. Crane that there was no use in trying to express it any other way but bluntly.

"The second reason concerns us all," she said. "Here we are, five of us, and never enough of anything to go around, from hairpins to prayer books. Adele, arriving at an age when she must have her chance, and Loomis nearly fifteen years old and the whole question of his education to be decided. If you were married, there would be only four of us."

"Five blue bottles buzzing on a wall! One got married, and then there were but four!" Marcia recited.

"It's an awful thing to say, my dear, but do you realize what it would mean if there were only four of us instead of five?"

"Yes, I think so," Marcia admitted. "It's like people starving in a lifeboat—some one has to go."

"One place less at dinner, one laundry bill less every week, one dress more for Adele, one pair of shoes extra for Loomis. My dear, I wonder if you do realize what it would mean?" Mrs. Crane asked earnestly.

"Oh, yes! With us it's not only every hair of our head that's numbered, but every lump of sugar we eat," said Marcia.

"And then there's something else," Mrs. Crane went on. "Now that we're on the subject. It's Adele and Loomis that I'm thinking of, and not your father or myself."

"You needn't have said that, mother," Marcia smiled.

"It seems as though I must say everything that *can* be said to justify the other things I have to say," Mrs. Crane smiled back at her. "If you were to marry Philip Blagden, it—it would be natural for him to take an

interest in your sisters and your brother's welfare."

"Oh, but mother, really——"

"Let me finish, Marcia. I don't mean money or anything like that, although even there you yourself would probably be in a position to help out a little."

"Well, what do you mean then?"

"I mean that Blagden Place is very large, and that there's always room for one more in the Blagden car. They never know how many people are going to sit down to dinner there until the meal is served."

"Still, I don't see——" objected Marcia.

"Oh, surely!" Mrs. Crane insisted. "Adele and Loomis have had precious little fun, precious little chance to enjoy themselves. With Blagden Place and all that goes with it at their disposal, it would mean a great deal to them."

"Poor kids!"

"To ride to the beach in the Blagden car once in a while instead of having to walk. To sit at table and enjoy a meal without the knowledge of dishes to be washed afterward. Just to breathe a different air from the air of this house occasionally. I don't know how to explain it, if you don't see what I mean!"

"Oh, yes, I see!" said Marcia. "Peace of mind, and security, and comfort, and all the rest of it for me, and a little graft on the side for Loomis and Adele."

"Yes, if you want to express it that way. It would mean more to them than you realize perhaps. It—it would even mean quite a little to me."

"Oh, I understand that!" Marcia agreed. "In fact your second reason is much better than the first. Especially the 'then there were but four' part."

They sat in silence for quite a long time, while Marcia seemed to have buried herself in a maze of thoughts

which her mother saw no way of interrupting.

"I'm sorry, Marcia," Mrs. Crane said finally.

"Sorry?" Marcia repeated vaguely. "Oh, yes! So am I, very sorry for him."

"Him—who?" asked her mother, quite at a loss for the moment.

"Philip Blagden," said Marcia, and went upstairs to her room.

Behind her in the living room her mother sat very still by the window, gazing out at the lawn with eyes that saw nothing, her thin, middle-aged cheeks burning with sudden shame.

CHAPTER III.

"Arthur, dear, please order everything on the bill of fare that's cold," Mrs. Blagden commanded, when the Water Sports committee was finally assembled on the top veranda. "Virginia, my darling child, if I allow you to eat crab flakes ravigote will you promise not to be sick afterward?"

"Yes, mother, cross my heart," Virginia began enthusiastically, but her mother hastily staved off any further declarations of intention on her part.

"That will be quite sufficient, I think," she assured her. "Philip, will you look after Marcia, please, and see that she gets a great deal of everything?"

"Oh, we've already started with *beaucoup* olives!"

"And then, Richard, you may kindly look after me and see that I don't take any more of anything than is good for me. I shall look after Virginia; the parental eye has charms to soothe the savage appetite."

"And I'll look after Mr. Stark," announced Virginia, deftly balancing a great deal of butter on a very small piece of roll.

"Oh, very well, Miss Blagden!"

"And who looks after me?" asked Mr. Blagden from his end of the table.

"Perhaps—perhaps I could, if you'll let me," Marcia suggested shyly with a smile, but Philip was "over the top" at once.

"You could," he objected, "but I won't let you. I want you to look after me."

"You're out of luck, pop!" Virginia proclaimed, and turned her attention to the olives.

"Why, certainly," Mrs. Blagden agreed with Philip. "Pay no attention whatever to my husband, Marcia. Just pass him the cucumbers and he will be perfectly contented. Arthur, my dear," she added, smiling at him across the table, "did you say anything a while ago about hatching out a china egg?"

"China egg!" exclaimed Philip. "What on earth are you talking about, mother?"

"Your mother and I were talking about—er—about chickens; yes," Mr. Blagden explained, frowning at his wife.

"You see, your father was trying to teach an old hen how to hatch eggs," began Mrs. Blagden. "A subject in which they are really quite proficient. I'd call it a day on the olives if I were you, Virginia. He didn't think—oh, well, never mind, here comes the strained gumbo! I adore strained gumbo!"

"Let's not pay any attention to her at all," smiled Philip. "The poor woman is raving from lack of food. We'll just go right ahead as though she weren't there; what do you say, Marcia?"

"All right, Philip," Marcia replied. "Come on, race you to the bottom—remember?"

"Gosh, yes!" Philip laughed. "They'll make us stand in the corner, won't they? Haven't thought of that for years. Oh, no fair spilling half of it in your saucer!"

4—Ains.

They laughed and choked over their highly undignified performance, and Dicky Stark turned to Virginia.

"Say, young woman," he remonstrated with her, "stop kicking me, will you?"

"Pay attention to me, then," replied the extraordinarily observant child. "Philip's going cuckoo over Marcia. I'll say he is!"

"Less loud, and not so funny!" Richard advised her.

It was terrible, Marcia was thinking as she sat there laughing and playing silly games with Philip, things they had not done since they were children. "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor" with the almonds, and "This is an elephant and this is a dodo bird and the next one is a—a roaring lion" with the French-friend potatoes.

It was terrible that she should be able to sit there next to him and have him look into her eyes and not see what was in her soul. It seemed so terribly easy to be horrid, as she had said to herself at the telephone a little while before. It was going to be so terribly easy to do what she had set out to attempt, and it should have been so utterly impossible.

But Marcia did not really hear Philip's light, running chatter. She was listening with every outward appearance of attention, while some mechanical portion of her mind was prompting her to say "Yes" and "No" and "Indeed, it is," at the right moments, but she was thinking of something entirely different.

She was thinking of what it was that had finally decided her to follow her mother's suggestion, and turn her wits to the capturing of Philip. Certainly not Adele's perfectly brutal comments on the undertaking.

"You're not too proud to try, are you?" the latter had asked. "Oh, I know what you and mother were talk-

ing about! You're a poor simp if you pass up a chance like that. Hop to it, kid, over the hot sands! There are lots worse things than marrying Philip Blagden, take it from me."

And not little Loomis' wistful, "Gee, sis, pretty soft!" when she had gone off the next morning in the Blagden car to attend a meeting of her committee.

Nor yet her father's vague attempts to apologize for the whole miserable business.

"Marcia," he had said to her, peering out at her suddenly over the top of his spectacles, "Marcia — something I wanted to say to you. Can't think what it was now. Been reading 'The Crimson Footprint.' Put it out of my mind. Something you were going to do—mustn't do it if you don't want to. Can't think what it was now."

It was none of these things that had decided her. It was something Dicky Stark had said just the evening before, when they had been fixing the fancy-dress bundles for the harlequin race.

They were talking about the war, a topic which even then seemed to hold certain elements of interest for the general public, and, as usual, Dicky Stark was bemoaning his enforced sojourn in Washington. There was no end as a rule to his jeremiads on this subject. Silver threads among the gold, he ruefully called his service stripes.

"I was stewing around in Washington trying to get sent over. That was when they had me all sewed up in the intelligence department. I finally had the orders to sail in my pocket, mind you, and then they pulled the armistice on me."

"They say they're quite anxious for volunteers for the army of occupation," Mrs. Blagden put in slyly.

"Thanks," said Richard. "I've got plenty of things to occupy me now. Gosh, that reminds me, I had some news the other day—about a chap called Duncan White!"

"Who?" asked Marcia.

"Duncan White," Richard repeated. "Any of you remember Duncan White? He came up here several times with me before the war. Mary Ransom knew him, and the Craigs. I guess perhaps you never saw him."

"I remember some one by that name," said Philip. "Big fellow, wasn't he, dark haired, about our age?"

"Yes," Richard replied. "I thought he was up at Sound Beach that time you were visiting the Blaines, Marcia, three years ago or whenever it was."

"He may have been," Marcia hesitated. "I don't seem to remember at all. I certainly wouldn't know him if I saw him again."

"Well, what about him?" asked Philip. "He went overseas, didn't he, in seventeen?"

"Yes," Richard told them. "He went overseas with the marines, and then in eighteen he was reported missing. No one ever found out what had become of him, and then the other day I ran into some people who had the dope. It seems he was taken prisoner."

"Oh, then he wasn't killed?" asked Marcia.

"Well, no, he was taken prisoner, see? Some little burg on the Marne he got into by mistake one night with some of his men, and they raffled the whole lot."

"You'd think he'd have been able to send word back," said Philip. "And where's he been since the armistice—is a hospital or something?"

"No; you see, it turns out he's still missing—"

"Still missing!" Marcia exclaimed.

"Yes," Richard went on. "You see, they finally got hold of the prison-camp records and found his name all right. But it seems he escaped. In September."

"Good egg!" said Philip.

"Yes, Duncan was a live wire all right. Well, that's all. He escaped."

and he's never turned up anywhere since. It's been ten months now. He must have gotten his somewhere on the way, or at the border perhaps. Any-way there seems to be no question about it now. He was a darned fine chap. Come on, Marcia, snap out of it, we'll never get through!"

Marcia began to work on another costume. As for Dicky Stark, he was not to blame, of course. He could not possibly have known, or even imagined, that she had been engaged to be married to Duncan White.

She hoped fervently that no one would say anything to her for a while until she could trust herself not to reply "Duncan White is dead" to any remark which might be made to her. And then there were those silly knots that had to be tied around the pile of bundles on the table before her.

Duncan White!

It had happened up at Sound Beach, just before he sailed for France. It would have been what her mother called a sentimental marriage, for Duncan was quite alone in the world, and what little money he had came to him once a week in a yellow envelope.

"I don't make enough now to keep a mousetrap in cheese," he had said to Marcia. "But I will some day, and in the meantime we'll have to do without a few things. Shoes, for instance. Shucks, we should worry! We'll be walking on air!"

They had not planned to be married in any event until there was a little more cheese in the mousetrap, which was one reason why Duncan had insisted that their engagement should be kept to themselves until after the war.

"There's nothing in advertising the fact that we're a couple of darned fools yet!" he smiled at her. There was no one who could possibly suspect. Mary Ransom had come up to Sound Beach for a week-end or two, but she would not have noticed anything.

"But I'm so glad we are," Marcia had replied. "I'll write to you every day."

"That's probably more than I'll be able to do," he prophesied. "But I tell you what—every afternoon at five-o'clock—that will be about noon here—I'll say 'Hello, Marcia!' and you say 'Hello, Duncan!'"

And now Duncan White was dead. It was that which had decided Marcia. What did it matter now what she did?

And so Marcia sat with Philip on the top veranda, watching the fireworks, quiet as a mouse, with the gleam of her smile always ready for his eyes, while Virginia draped herself around the railing and screamed at the loud ones.

"Oooh! Hold your ears, Mr. Stark! Oh, see that one swerve! This is a wooley one, capertillars—I mean, caterpillars. Isn't it g-glorious?"

And behind them Mrs. Blagden winked at her husband in the glare of a Roman candle and nodded at the two over in the corner.

"Arthur," she whispered in his ear "do you see our son?"

"Intermittently," Mr. Blagden conceded.

"Well, intermittently as it may be, I presume you observe that he is paying what, for him, is marked attention to a young lady?"

"More power to him!" grunted Mr. Blagden.

"China eggs, indeed! We'll give them a house as a wedding present," his wife announced. "Virginia!" she added suddenly, catching sight of her daughter gyrating perilously around a column. "Come down off that this instant! Richard, take her by the neck and give her a good shaking, will you, please?"

"It's all right, Mrs. Blagden," laughed Richard. "We're just pretending we're a pin wheel."

"Pinhead!" corrected Mrs. Blagden, but Virginia had already found something else to do. She was leaning far out over the balcony, obviously reposing less confidence in the laws of gravity than in Richard's hold on her ankles, gravely conversing with some contemporaries below.

"Hello there, P'tricia! Hello there, Loomis!" she observed. "Watching the fireworks? Slick, you bet!"

Marcia said nothing at all.

"Your sister's up here, Loomis," went on Virginia, utterly unconscious of the fact that in those few simple words she had completely spoiled the remainder of the evening for Miss Mary Ransom, into whose attentive ears they fell far more loudly than the bursting rockets. And still Marcia said nothing at all. She hoped that Loomis had brushed his hair carefully.

"Who's that you're talking to, Virginia?" asked Mrs. Blagden. "Who—Loomis Crane? Why don't you ask him if he wants to come up? Then we can take him home with Marcia."

Over in her corner Marcia remained perfectly silent, but she smiled a little to herself in the shadows. A few moments later she managed to sound quite surprised when Loomis came up to shake hands with Philip. Incidentally his hair was really very nicely brushed.

"Why, hello, buddy! You here?" she said to him, and looked at him hard with a look no Crane child ever misunderstood.

"Hello, sis!" he replied. "Sure, I'm here. Mrs. Blagden said I could—and I'm going back with you in the automobile."

"Well, think of that," said Marcia. "Won't that be splendid?"

"Slicker than beets," announced Loomis, and departed in search of Virginia.

"Funny kid," Marcia smiled. "What were you saying, Philip?"

And at the same time, on another top veranda very far away from Greenchester, two men were sitting, smoking silently.

It was the Fourth of July, but they were not watching fireworks. They were in the uniform of the American Red Cross, and they were sitting very late at night on the veranda of the Petropavlov Hospital, looking out over the harbor of Odessa.

"Gosh, Bill!" one of them remarked suddenly after a long silence. "Just came to my mind. This is the Fourth of July! We ought to have hung out a flag."

"Fourth of July?" the other replied wearily. "What's that, Ed?"

"Doesn't seem to mean much out here, does it?" his companion smiled. "I had forgotten all about it. A year ago I was in the Place de la Concorde watching the parade, just before I went out to the Third Division."

"A year ago," the other grumbled, "I was running up and down the Marne trying to find a French general so he'd give me leave to establish an emergency hospital in his sector."

"Did you?"

"No, but it didn't matter much. I'd had the hospital running for a week already. A year ago! Where you'll be a year from now is much more to the point! I should worry. I wouldn't care what day of the year it was if they'd only let my supplies through. I'll swap all the flags in Europe for some quinine."

"Another hard day, wasn't it?"

"Oh, about the same! Trouble is the days aren't long enough to do all there is to be done. I never saw such a place as this. The records are all absolutely *napoo*. I'm no blank hound, and I'd just as soon drink vodka as fill out a report in triplicate, but I'd like to know a little about this so-called hospital besides its name. Just because they're civilians is no reason why I

should be able to guess their names and where they come from."

"It is a mess, all right," the other agreed. "They brought in a bird this morning who's got my goat."

"Who, that chap in number twelve?"

"Yes, have you seen him? Number twelve in the south ward? Dumped him down in the courtyard and beat it before I could get anything out of them. Don't know where he's from or anything. He hasn't a thing on him to identify him by, just his muzhik clothes. Could you make out what was the matter with him. I couldn't make him understand me at all. I don't blame him. My Russian isn't anything to set to music!"

"I guess he didn't understand you," said the older man. "As far as I can make out he's suffering from aphasia, or amnesia, or something like that. He's lost his memory."

"Oh, is that it? I couldn't dope him out at all. Just lay there in bed and stared at the clock. Well, it's hard enough to make heads or tails out of these Russians, but if he can't speak we never will find out who he is."

"I'd give a good deal to know how he got here myself."

"Well, you'll have to bring him to, Bill, and make him talk, if you can understand his lingo. All I get when they chatter at me is *nietchevo!*"

"He can talk," said the other. "I was passing through the ward this afternoon and I heard him."

"You did! What did he say? Could you understand him?"

"Sure, I understood him. That's why I'd like to know how he got here. He sat up in bed all of a sudden and smiled. And then he spoke, quite plainly."

"What did he say?"

"I don't know what he meant, I'm sure, but it was in English. Yes; he said 'Hello, Marcia!'"

CHAPTER IV.

All Greenchester turned out for the Crane-Blagden wedding. Some of them to see Roscoe Crane give away his daughter in the vague hope that he would appear at the church with his flute, or in his carpet slippers, or carrying a detective story under his arm. Others to ascertain how Mrs. Crane would acquit herself of the festivities inseparable from such a ceremony. Many of them for the pure fascination of watching the Blagden millions pass into the hands of little Marcia. And, of course, quite a few because they happened to be friends of the bride and bridegroom.

Dicky Stark had them all classified, and proposed to seat them accordingly at the church—the I Knew Its, the I Told You Sos, the Who'd Have Thought Its, and the Bless You My Childrens!

Of course, the news of the engagement had been received with varying degrees of enthusiasm, depending largely on the sex and age of the recipient. It had been announced at a big dance up at Blagden Place, along in August, to the utter dismay of a number of young ladies present.

Incidentally it had not originally been intended that the announcement be made by Virginia, especially in the manner in which she elected to divest herself of that important piece of news. For, having discovered Marcia and her brother in the library shortly before the hour set for the great climax, she planted herself at the door and proclaimed the fact in tones to which the word stentorian does little, if any, credit!

"This way to the lions!" she howled, before her mother could lay her hands on her. "This way to the lions!" And when Philip and Marcia came running out there was nothing left for them to do but blush.

As might have been expected the news made far more of a stir in the village than even the impending minstrel show. And that was what Sarah Blagden called the annual chestnut spree.

"Under the wheezing chestnut spree—the Greenchester Dramatic Club," she would inform you. "Most of the time it is merely dramatically social. Once, and on some sorrowful occasions twice, a year it becomes socially dramatic."

The men for the most part seemed to agree with Dicky Stark.

"What do I think? You ask me what I think?" he held forth to an amused circle in the men's dressing room during a dress rehearsal. One half of his face was coal black, while the other still shone out virginally white, which gave him a strange yes-and-no appearance.

"Yes, Mr. Tambo, tell us what you think about this Crane-Blagden-engagement. You know both of the high contracting parties about as well as any one here."

"I sure do, Mr. Bones, I sure do. And I'll tell you just what I think about it. How in the name of Christy's minstrels do you keep this beastly stuff out of your eye? I think that Marcia Crane is worth her Ransom in gold, that's what I think! Hey, look out there, you big boob, you'll rip my pants all to—"

It was a very bad moment for Dicky Stark, as a score of exuberantly athletic young men proceeded to pound the breath out of him, but their roars of laughter proved that his remarks had not fallen on barren ground, nor yet among thorns.

"That's the best line I've heard in months," said Archie Craig, the Mr. Bones of the cast. "That, and the story about the ventriloquist and the parrots. How about putting it into the show? Bring down the house!"

"Oh, you'd bring down the house all right!" Richard grunted. "So did Samson. And now I'll tell you something else—"

"Go on! Go on!"

"I'm all for having Phil marry a Greenchester girl, instead of going off to Ishpeming, or Apalachicola, or some such place."

"What do you mean? That isn't funny. Why so?"

"Why so? Because it makes it a lot cheaper for the ushers. Marry where you live and support home industries. That's my theory."

"I don't know whether she comes under the head of industries," some one remarked, "but he'll have to support her all right!"

"Well, and why not?" Richard replied. "A lot of old hens around here will cackle about how lucky she is to get him. I say he's darn lucky to get her. Marcia's a good scout."

"And she's certainly done nothing to land him," added Archie Craig. "Why, it's only recently that they've been around much together at all."

"Oh, she's been batting it out pretty well up at Blagden Place lately!" Richard admitted. "But if she has, it's because she's been asked, and some people I could mention haven't. With them it's been a case of many have called but few have been asked again!"

"Stark, old scout," they laughed at him, "if you were only half as funny in the show as you are while you're dressing for it, we could run for a week!"

"One night's enough," he assured them. "I'll spend the rest of the week getting this blacking off. Oh, say, Archie, just thought of a new line; Tinney stuff! I tell you So-and-so's conversation is just a lot of odds and ends, see? And you say, 'Is that so? Is that so?' And I say, 'It doesn't ever prove anything.' And you say, 'It doesn't?'

And I say, 'No, the ends don't justify the odds!'"

So the male population of Greenchester, unsuspectingly charitable according to its kind, disposed of the Crane-Blagden engagement, after squeezing one good laugh out of it.

A laugh which, while it may never have seen the footlights of the minstrel show, nevertheless brightened many a Greenchester breakfast table, until in due time, of course, its gentle echoes came to tickle the eardrums of Miss Mary Ransom.

A process ill calculated to sweeten the milk of human kindness in that young lady's nature, already considerably soured by the turn of recent events. Mary Ransom at once began to search for a weapon with which to repay that laugh, and found it quite by chance, and without any appreciation at the time of its real value. But that it would cause pain, and possibly dismay, she had no doubt.

And it was something more than the old snapshot which she had run across in a scrapbook, a snapshot of Marcia Crane and Duncan White made with a group of people up at Sound Beach. The snapshot alone was of no particular importance, but, taken with this other thing which she had found, it became quite a document.

She squeezed a good deal of a laugh out of it herself, on the morning after the show.

"In this case," she remarked, "I should say the ends more than justify the odds!"

As for the "old hens," as Richard had so inelegantly referred to them, most of them viewed the event with a large measure of sentimental sympathy. An engagement is essentially a romantic occurrence, no matter what the circumstances which may have led up to it, and a romantic occurrence in the eyes of most elderly ladies is as the sight of

the defenselessly recumbent nut to the squirrel.

And in this case the circumstances were all so entirely in favor of the sympathetic outlook. Now if it had been some minx from beyond the pale of Greenchester who had stolen away young Blagden, the lorgnettes would have been anything but rose colored, and the spoken comment would have assumed the acidulated tenor of suspicious condemnation.

But it was Marcia, their own little Marcia Crane, and what could be sweeter, and better, and more deservedly fortunate than that she should marry Philip Blagden?

"How splendid for Sarah! That dear, sweet girl!"

It was characteristic of Marcia's effect on older people that they should have discussed her primarily as a daughter-in-law, and complimented Mrs. Blagden on securing her more than Philip for having won her.

Of course, Mrs. Ransom and one or two other mothers of hitherto hopeful daughters abstained from this opinion, and chewed the bitter cud of disappointed aspirations in private. In their eyes, because she had succeeded in doing what their own entries had miserably failed to achieve, she was a heartless, mercenary little wretch. A verdict which, no matter how well founded, did nothing but betray their own cupidity, and the unlovely nature of their daughters.

But Mrs. Stark and Mrs. Craig and the rest of them, mothers of sons, it is true, in many cases, were agreeably, and it must be said genuinely, congratulatory, and ordered expensive wedding presents, which they charged to their husbands to be sure.

Incidentally, it would have been difficult to say which was the more openly jubilant, Mrs. Blagden or Mrs. Crane. If her own home each had received the news characteristically.

"My precious lambs!" Mrs. Blagden said to Philip and Marcia when they told her what had happened. "I give you my blessing, if that's of any use to you, and I hope you will both live to be as happy as I am at this moment. Please try and behave like human beings when there are other people around, that's all I ask. And you'd better not tell Virginia anything about it, if you want any peace!"

Mrs. Crane sat down in a kitchen chair and looked out of the window while Marcia reported the successful termination of her undertaking.

"And so everything is fixed, and he's coming around in a little while to see you and father."

"We'll have to manage a wedding dress—somehow," said her mother. "And a breakfast. I'm sure you will be very happy, my dear."

In public Sarah Blagden positively crowded with pleasure.

"My little Marcia Crane!" she beamed. "There isn't another girl in all Greenchester I would prefer to have make a grandmother out of me!"

A remark whose every winged word, let alone its gentle echoes, came to tickle the eardrums of Mrs. Ransom, since it was made directly to her in the presence of a thoroughly appreciative concourse of contemporaries. Sarah Blagden was nothing if not human! And not for nothing was she the great lady of Greenchester. At all events she knew just how rude she could be to every one, down to four decimal places.

"My daughter's fiancé, Mr. Philip Blagden," Mrs. Crane remarked casually in the hearing of people to whom she owed money. For, of course, Eliza Crane was nothing if not practical.

Among the younger sets discussion was more agitated and opinion more varied.

Girls like Dorothy Craig and Mildred Stark were belligerently enthusiastic

from the very first, and vigorously combated any attempt to cast the slur of disparagement on Marcia's motives.

"Supposing he has a lot of money," they insisted. "What of it? If he can afford to make things very pleasant for her, all the better; she deserves it. He's a corker, and she's a peach, and it's a splendid match, and here's hoping they live forever."

"Mary Ransom says——"

"It doesn't matter what Mary Ransom says! Ransom is as Ransom does."

None of which could be expected to soothe Miss Mary Ransom's feelings. But she consoled herself for the time being by having an enlargement made of that Sound Beach snapshot.

"Oh, yes, Marcia Crane has done pretty well for herself; pretty well! Buttered on both sides! I'll say she has!" was the verdict of another group, whose tendency it was to mistake cynicism for worldly wisdom.

There was a group of young things—barely out of short skirts—very barely, as Dicky Stark once remarked—any one of whom would have given the apple of her eye to be in Marcia's shoes, and none of whom had any real conviction that Philip's fortune had had anything to do with the case.

"I must say Philip Blagden had very little competition!" said a third little coterie, made up largely of young ladies who had never been notoriously conspicuous themselves as storm centers of masculine attention. The stuff that wallflowers are made of. Girls for whom the feverish cult of minor poets as a substitute for matrimony was becoming more and more imperative with each passing season.

It was refreshing to turn from these to the frank hostility of Mary Ransom and her set, and listen to their perfectly genuine anthems of hate. They were furious at Marcia on account of her cleverness which had outwitted their own, for, of course, they admitted of

no other excuse for her success, and they were doubly furious at themselves.

"To think of that little ninny beating us to it!"

"That's where we were wrong—the kid's clever!"

And they were openly contemptuous of Philip for his choice of that "little ninny" when he might have had any one of them, for the asking, to grace his home. Any one of them, all complete with gowns and furs and necklaces of the latest model, finished in applied cosmetics, instead of the little fluffy-haired simpleton with the face of a child and the manners of a doleful saint.

"If he had only fallen for a vamp, I wouldn't be so surprised," one of them complained.

That was it! What bored them so utterly was this relapse into simplicity on Philip's part. It was so ridiculous, and so very uncomplimentary to themselves! Philip Blagden must be a fool. At least, that was certainly the line for them to follow.

"I don't see what Marcia can possibly see in Philip Blagden!" Mary Ransom began cleverly enough, only unfortunately, for her the remark was caught by Adele, who lost no time in returning it to her freighted with gall.

"I expect Marcia probably sees what the fox saw in the grapes before they turned sour on him," she replied. "Only I've always thought it must have been a vixen in the story. I suppose you know the story, don't you, Mary?"

"Oh, go play a flute!" Mary snapped, thus adding enormously to the gayety of Greenchester, if not to its dignity, and at the same time letting herself in for one of those comparatively rare thrusts of Adele's, when she managed to combine real nimbleness of wit with her disagreeable dexterity of tongue.

"You can play solos on a flute," she retorted, "and that's more than you can do on a second fiddle!"

"Game, set, and match!" murmured Dicky Stark.

Mary Ransom's next effort was more successful. It was aimed directly at Marcia the first time she found herself face to face with her on the beach after the announcement, and it went to its mark supported by that weapon which Mary Ransom had found quite by chance. Although how true it was to the very center of that mark she had no means of knowing at the time.

"My dear," she said to her, "'I've been waiting to present my good wishes until I could do so in person!'"

"That's awfully sweet of you," Marcia replied in her best, saintly manner. She had found out long ago that it annoyed Mary enormously, and she knew, moreover, that there was very little sincerity to be expected in anything Mary might say. That made it hard to listen to some of the others.

"It's all been such a delightful surprise, hasn't it?" Mary Ransom went on.

"Well, yes, I suppose it has to some people," Marcia agreed.

"Yes, indeed! I declare there's no accounting for tastes, is there?"

"Why, how do you mean?"

"Well, I should have thought that Philip Blagden would have picked out some one entirely different. Oh, I admire his choice, my dear, I'm sure! But it just shows how mistaken one can be."

"Yes, doesn't it?" Marcia remarked blandly. After all, she could afford to be patient with Mary Ransom. But she was not prepared for her next remark.

"And as for you, my dear," she continued, "I had my mind all made up that you would marry quite another kind of man."

"Oh, really?" Marcia laughed. "You didn't think I'd make the grade, perhaps?"

"Oh, you mustn't think that!" Mary Ransom assured her. "No, but I had another type all picked out for you."

"And what was he like?" asked Marcia.

"Well, some one like Duncan White, for instance. Do you remember Duncan White?"

She stopped to look more attentively at Marcia's face, and was not disappointed with what she found there for a second. Her weapon was possessed of a cutting edge at any rate.

"Duncan White?" Marcia forced herself to laugh. "I—I don't remember. Is it—is it some one I ought to know?"

"Oh, surely, I expect you remember him!" Wasn't he up at Sound Beach that summer you were there? In fact I think I have a photograph somewhere taken of us all up at the Blaines. You know, one of those groups—"

"Oh, yes, one of those groups!" Marcia laughed again. "Still one doesn't necessarily have to marry a man because he happens to be in the same group—or even remember him afterward, does one?"

"Oh, of course not, my dear, of course not!"

"What—what made you think of him anyway?" Marcia asked. Was Mary Ransom simply trying to be disagreeable, or did she really know something? After all, this stupid photograph was of no importance.

"Oh, I don't know!" Mary Ransom answered slowly. "Perhaps it was something I heard you say once when we were in swimming."

"When we were in swimming? What on earth do you mean?" Marcia asked quickly.

"There—don't be alarmed, my dear," Mary Ransom smiled. "It was just something I happened to remember. But I wonder—do you still say 'Hello, Duncan!' when the whistle blows at noon? I remember now at the time it struck me as such a funny thing to do."

"Hello, Duncan?"

"Yes, that's what you said. I thought perhaps you meant Duncan White, and I was wondering if you still did it. But there, of course you don't. You're engaged to marry Philip now, aren't you? And you don't even remember Duncan White!"

"Duncan White is dead!" Marcia exclaimed without thinking. "They—they were talking about him some time ago."

"Yes, so Dicky Stark tells me. Duncan White is dead. Such a dreadful pity. He really was so nice, and terribly good looking! But there—I'm boring you, I'm afraid, since you don't even remember him."

And she left Marcia standing alone, staring at the sand at her feet, and wondering what Mary Ransom really knew about herself and Duncan White.

For Mary Ransom was an enemy; she could see that. Adele and Richard and all of them had contrived to make her so—with their unfriendly laughter. And Duncan White, the past when Duncan White had been alive, was a weapon in her hands.

What did she purpose to do with it?

To be continued in the December issue.



Pagliacci à la Mode

By Sophie Kerr

Author of "Home Brew,"

"The Mos' Beautiful Girl in New York," etc.



OUT of town visitors and dwellers in the hinterland of the upper West Side, seeing the glittering, golden creature in box thirty, thumbed their bulky programs vigorously until they were satisfied that it was really Mrs. Carseme, the one whom all the society papers talk so much about, you know. "Mrs. William Travers Carseme—odd Mondays;" it was there for all the world to see.

And Linda Carseme was there herself for all the world to see, wearing the Carseme sapphires, a glory of sullen blue flame against her white shoulders, matching the sullen flames of her blue eyes, those wide, blue, sullen, drooping eyes which seemed always waiting, questioning. For the rest, her beauty was entirely modern—rather high cheek bones, an impudent nose, just a little thick at the tip, level brows, a delicate red mouth too wide for perfection, but nevertheless strangely perfect when she smiled, and honey-colored hair with a glint of copper in it to give it life and accent. She had been the first woman of her set to bob her hair, and she had been the first to do it. Now it was waved and drawn close to her head so that the exquisite roundness of the modeling of her head might not be missed. Her dress of some metallic brocade was exactly the color of her wonderful hair, golden and copper. Effective, all of it Linda Carseme liked to give an

effect.* It was, perhaps, the only pleasure of which she never tired.

She had entered her box some time during the first opera, and when the lights went up and the rustle of the intermission began there she was, alone, apparently, and indifferent to the battery of opera glasses and the thumbing of programs which always followed her appearance. But a moment later a man appeared behind her, a little, dandified man with a greedy, malicious, weak face, to which his waxed mustache gave a perpetual smirk. Linda hardly turned her head, but her sullen eyes took note of him.

"Where's Billy?" said the little man, sitting down briskly.

"Coming. He adores 'Pagliacci,' you know."

"Funny taste. I hate the bawling Italian stuff. Who is it says they sing with their bowels?"

Linda Carseme turned ever so slightly toward him.

"Don't be nasty, George. I'm not in the mood for it."

George Hughes' greedy little eyes devoured her; he almost seemed to lick his lips with the pleasure of seeing her, being near her. He leaned closer and lowered his voice.

"What are you in the mood for, Beauty?" he asked.

Again the oblique glance, but she did not draw away.

"Oh, gossip—look, there's Clara

Belmar in that old black rag again! She's the only woman I know who's never in debt to her dressmaker, and the reason is she never gets any new clothes."

George Hughes laughed. This was what he liked.

"But the faithful Freddie doesn't mind. He came early. So did I, hoping you'd be here."

"And there's Reggie Tomlinson—and Mrs. Reggie. She's quite wonderful, isn't she?"

"Oh, she's wonderful enough, provided you'll contribute to her charities! I don't like that Spanish get-up she affects. She's too fat for it. Listen, Linda—I saw the most gorgeous Spanish shawl yesterday. A chap I know, an artist, has it. It's the clearest Chinese yellow, with great, white long-tailed birds with green bodies, and rose and magenta and dull-blue flowers, big wicked flowers, embroidered all over it so that it hangs heavy in your hands. And it drips with fringe. You ought to have it."

"I'd like it. Who is the man who's got it? Does he want to sell?"

George Hughes leaned still nearer, his gaze fastened on her mouth. He was almost trembling with his weakness and his desire.

"He doesn't want to sell it, no. But he will—to me. I'll get it for you. May I?"

Linda Carseme moved away from him, and leaned back. For the first time since he had been in the box she looked at him squarely.

"You can buy it, if you will, George," she said, in her slow, indifferent voice, "and I'll buy it from you. I'm wild for a really good yellow shawl, and I know how clever you are about such things. Is it really a good one?"

He disregarded the question.

"Why won't you let me give it to you?" he demanded.

"But that's absurd. Why should

you? No, buy it for me, please, like a good boy, George, and I'll buy it from you."

"You're rotten to me, Linda. Rotten. You've let me hang around after you, you've let me fetch and carry, and be handy man when Billy wasn't inclined to be useful. But when I want to do something for you, you say no, without so much as a flicker of one of those adorable long lashes of yours. You can't treat a man that way forever. I won't stand it. You hardly spoke to me when I came in the box to-night. I'd been waiting and hoping, and hanging around, like one of your little dogs, and when I saw you here, alone—"

"Please don't raise your voice, George. And don't be absurd. What are you in such a tantrum about, anyway? Because I won't let you give me a yellow shawl? As if I couldn't afford it, or was a grafting chorus girl. What would Billy think? And do! You know how jealous he is. Please—please, people are beginning to turn and look! Thank Heaven, there's the conductor!"

The lights went down and there was a spatter of applause as the conductor went swiftly to his place in the orchestra pit. But George Hughes was not to be silenced. His excited, febrile whisper went on.

"Oh, God, what wouldn't I do for you if you'd only be kind to me! Linda, Linda, I'm crazy-mad about you! You're so beautiful, you're not like any other woman in the world. You're so slim, so white, so soft! If I could kiss your arms, or that adorable little hollow at the base of your throat, I'd die with the delight of it!" He seized her hand convulsively.

With a violent, yet controlled effort, not moving her body or head at all, Linda Carseme wrenched herself free.

"You rotten little beast! You vile little beast! And I've always felt sorry

for you! If you don't leave this box instantly, I will. To come here and make a scene, of all places!"

The little man was almost in tears.

"Linda, Linda, don't!" he begged. "Don't send me away. Don't! I couldn't bear it. Why can't you care for me—just a little? I ask so little, Linda. Only to be near you, to see your beauty! It's this strange, unseizable beauty of yours that drives me out of my mind! I know Billy's a madman for jealousy, but I'd be careful—so careful of you! There'd be no risk. No woman would be loved as I'd love you. You've seemed to like me, Linda. Give me a little more—be kind to me!"

Then Linda Carseme did a cruel thing, and what is infinitely more unwise, a foolish thing. Disgust and anger pushed her to it.

"I cannot understand why men as ugly as you are, George," she said, with a flicker of cold mirth in her voice, "ever try to play the rôle of romantic lover. You're like a little toad or a spider in an erotic frenzy. It's most unappetizing."

For a moment the two looked at each other, the man shuddering with rage and shock, his thin face drawn into venomous, wizened wrinkles.

"So that's it, is it? I'm unappetizing. You'd rather have a big man, a handsome man, a strong man—like Edgar Fleming." He spat the name at her venomously.

She did not move, but the darkness of her eyes flamed at him, and even through the dimness he could see the wave of blood come up and stain her white skin, betrayal of the sureness of his guess. Amato had sung the marching, sonorous prologue, the curtain was rising, but the two of them were oblivious, rapt in their own drama. The chorus swung out to them, surrounded them in a gust of melody.

*"Ritornano—
Pagliaccio è là."*

Under the cover of it George Hughes' voice rose a trifle.

"So that's it," he repeated. "That's why you came alone to-night, and arranged it so that Billy'd be late. I'm sure you arranged it, for Billy doesn't allow you too much liberty, does he? Waiting for Fleming! Big Fleming! Fair, handsome Edgar! Knight of the Golden Fleece!" He looked at her gold hair and laughed. "And the Lady of the Golden Key! I suppose, my dear, you've got one—the golden key that unlocks the unopened door? I know. And you're not the first, or the only, though he may tell you you are. Oh, the flocks of pretty ladies who've had one of those golden keys to Fleming's door! Is it in that charming jeweled vanity case you're holding so tight? And, good heavens, what is the man? A card sharp! A gambler! A race-track follower, running a stable on a shoe string! Comes from nothing! And nowhere! But he's big and he's handsome and he's got a way with the ladies. But listen, my dear Linda—do you find Fleming's false teeth and his toupee—appetizing? I believe 'appetizing' was the word. You didn't know he wore a toupee? Really, Linda, I'd never have suspected you of such girlish simplicity. Linda, another of the Ladies of the Golden Key. Linda, the unapproachable! Linda, with the jealous Billy always in the background. How funny! How comic!" He burst into laughter, little gusts of explosive, forced laughter.

On the stage *Tonio* had advanced to help *Nedda* from the cart, and *Canio* had dealt him the smart box on the ear that the action of the opera requires. The women of the chorus mock him: "How d'you like it, gallant lover? Prendi questo, bel galante!"

Linda Carseme rose, without haste.

"I told you to leave, George," she said quite evenly, "and since you won't,

I will." She held her hand still clutched tight over her vanity case, and outraged blood still colored her neck and face. But otherwise she gave not the least sign of agitation. She had taken one step toward the door of the box when it opened, and a man stood there. She held out a casual hand.

"How nice to see you, Edgar!" she said amiably. "George is just going, and Billy hasn't come, and I hate to be alone."

She turned toward George, and the little man, who had risen with her, walked past the newcomer and out of the box without a word. He did not speak, he did not even nod. Fleming looked after him in amused perplexity.

"What's up with George. He looked sick—had his eyes rolled up like a sleepwalker. Drunk?"

Linda Carseme sat down with perfect calmness.

"I think he was, rather. Or perhaps he's ill. He talked so oddly. I was awfully glad you came in when you did."

Bori, fresh-voiced, picturesque in her gypsy dress, was singing *Nedda's* first song. For a moment the two of them listened to the wistful beauty of it. Then Linda laughed.

"I might say that, too," she said. "'My heart, my restless heart, where art thou going?' Poor *Nedda*!"

"What was George saying?" Fleming sat down in the chair behind Linda, not too near, and well in the shadow. She wondered in spite of herself if he really did wear a toupee. But no, that was impossible. Where did George get all these spiteful speeches? Had she better tell Fleming, to put him on his guard? But no, George Hughes was always telling malicious stories; no one believed him. She'd say nothing. There was another reason which she would not admit, yet it was cogent. She was not sure enough of him to know whether he would relish a scarlet

thread of scandal connecting him with her spun before all New York. Climber he certainly was, and the spinning of such a thread might ruin some pet scheme of things for getting on. She could not quite gauge him. At times he was so reckless, at other times so cautious. That was why he intrigued her so in her idleness and wastefulness and her chafing at the endless watchfulness of Billy. He had the fascination of the tight-rope dancer who pirouettes over a chasm. And he was, as she had flung at George, handsome, big, strong. And he had a decided way with women.

"George was just chattering, but I thought rather at random," she answered him at last. "He's a funny little monkey, George."

"Do you care for monkeys?" He was looking at her now with that air of proprietorship which she loved. It was such a lawless proprietorship, different from the assured, heavy autoocracy of Billy.

"I hate them." She lifted her sullen eyes and let them soften into obedience and submission. It pleased her to do this, and she thought, as she did it, how such a look from her would have delighted Billy or raised George into the seventh heaven of anticipation. The small sense of her power gave her pleasure. If she could only make Fleming feel it, too! Would she ever be able to make him feel it? The question opened continual vistas.

At least the submission of her eyes drew him. He leaned toward her, even as George Hughes had done, and she did not draw back.

"You have your key?" he asked.

"Yes." She would not tell him that she never let it out of her hands, that she took far more care for its safety than she did of the sapphires around her neck.

"And you are coming to-morrow?" His hand carelessly touched the soft

roundness of her arm, and made her smooth flesh crisp and shiver under the contact.

"I am coming to-morrow."

"At five. It's twilight then. Wear a veil, and don't use your own car. I must be careful of you."

The voice of *Silvio*, imploring, importunate, rose to them:

"*Nedda, rispondimi,
Fuggi con me.*"

The two in the box did not hear his plea.

"I never saw you so beautiful as tonight," Edgar Fleming was murmuring.

"That is because I am happy."

"You are so beautiful, so wonderful! You're like a golden idol in this dress. My golden idol! I'm a miser of your gold, Linda. I want it all, every bit of it, and for my own. — My golden princess, *ma princesse bien aimée*. Tell me, are you glad to come to-morrow—a little bit?"

It was part of his attraction for her, that never in words did he seem sure of her. He asked favors, feigned humility, pretended to be at her command even while he commanded her most wholly and imperatively. If Billy had only done this, she thought! But Billy was never subtle. He took no joy in the finesse of love-making, knew nothing about it.

"You know I am glad," she answered with pride.

Strange that she should have thought of Billy. Even as *Canio*, pale, distraught, hurled his frantic questions at his faithless wife—"Who is thy lover—speak—*Il suo nome—parla!*"—the door of the box opened, and Billy Carseme stood there curiously pale, also. Or was it those impossible high lights which made him appear so? He came in, snatching off his coat, nodded to Fleming, dropped into a chair beside him. Linda smiled at him. Why not? It was so much easier to smile at Billy

and ignore him than to take him seriously.

"You're just in time to hear Caruso sob the 'Ridi,'" she whispered. "He's in gorgeous voice to-night. And Bori's divine!"

Billy Carseme did not look at her. Beside Fleming he seemed short and clumsy, though in reality he was over medium height, but the massiveness of his torso and his square-rigged shoulders threw him out of proportion. Built like a wrestler was Billy Carseme, blunt and strong.

As the curtain went down and Caruso began to take his inevitable curtain calls, Fleming rose to go.

"I must run around and find the Hardisons," he said. "We're going on to the 'Midnight Frolic.' Not a big party, just the four of us, but it's a sort of celebration, I believe. Chloe got her final decree to-day. She's an amusing creature." His tone relegated Chloe to a place among the unconsidered trifles of life.

His last glance at Linda significantly urged "To-morrow," and hers as clearly answered it with acquiescence. The lights went up, and Billy Carseme turned to his wife accusingly.

"Why'd you tell Cousin Olivia and Cousin Mary that I'd come in after dinner? You knew it'd make me fearfully late."

"But, Billy dear, they were so agitated and I couldn't make out what was the matter. It seemed urgent. Wasn't it?"

"Just as urgent as it always is. Cousin Olivia wants to change her will, and Cousin Mary's sore. You knew perfectly well what it was, and you could have put them off until tomorrow."

"You could have telephoned and put them off yourself, if you didn't want to go. And remember, Billy, they're your cousins, not mine. They're a perfect pestilence, I know, but I endure lots

more from them than you do." Something warned her that this complaint covered another and a more poignant accusation. She hoped some one would come in and divert him. "There's Edith Perceval beckoning, Billy. Shall we go over? She's such a pet of yours."

"I'm not going. I hate that woman, with her parrot voice, and so damned much calcimine that you don't know whether she's got a skin or not. What was Fleming doing in here with you when I came?"

Her voice became cool and amused. "He was listening to the music, dear Billy, and viewing, with edification, I hope, the story of the eternal triangle which Signor Gatti-Casazza has ordained for our entertainment this evening. I'm going over to Edith. I hope I'll find you in a sweeter humor when I come back."

The Perceval box was full of people, as usual, with Edith in the thick of it, punctuating her shrill chatter with quick, angular gestures, full of nervous animation. She screamed a welcome at Linda, and went on with the story she was telling, and Linda feigned an attention she did not feel. It gave her a moment's isolation to play with her own thoughts. What an evening! First George Hughes, decadent, distasteful. Then Edgar Fleming, and then the inevitable Billy. Why was Billy so greedy, so watchful? Other women's husbands were contentedly blind. She should consider Billy's devotion a compliment, she vaguely thought, but it was a hateful, tiresome one. After six years of marriage, Billy ought to be cooler. She glanced across to see if he was still glowering, alone, but the box was empty.

"And it was the chauffeur all the time!" Edith wound up her story with a triumphant bang, and every one shouted with laughter.

Linda escaped under cover of the

laugh, and went slowly back to her own box. Below on the stairway she saw Billy, and he was with George Hughes. It amused her, and gave her a faint sense of uneasiness. But George wouldn't dare say anything. There was nothing he could say, except surmises. She turned a little and spoke to some people she knew so that they would not see her and then she went on. The lights were going down, people were settling themselves for the second act, scurrying back to their places. The curtains had folded apart, and the big drum of *Tonio* was summoning the villagers to the comedy as Linda entered her own box again and sat down. This time she sat at the back. When Billy came in she would ask him if he did not want to go. They could avoid the awful wait for the car. She hated that long, after-opera wait for the car to come up. And the second act of "*Pagliacci*" always bored her so, with its ridiculous stabbings, after which the stabbed and the stabber take their complacent curtain calls.

Life would be unutterably stupid if it were not for Edgar Fleming. She dwelt on him, contrasting him with the other men she knew, and she put the tips of her fingers delicately against her vanity case. The little golden key was there; she had wrapped it in a tag of rose ribbon to keep her maid's eyes from it. To-morrow she would unwind the rose ribbon and slip the key into the door of that tall house on the secluded street where Fleming lived. She considered various precautions. She would stop the taxi at the corner and walk down. She would wear her plainest, oldest things, buy a new veil on the way. The last time, when she had gone out in that heavy gray veil, she imagined that her maid had looked at her questioningly. Stupid not to have thought of buying a new veil each time, before this. If Jane should go to Billy —servants sometimes did things like

that. Billy might even pay the woman to report to him. Oh, *Billy!* It always came back to his wearisome jealousy. Well, a man as jealous as Billy deserves to have his wife slip away from him.

Billy was coming in. He sat down beside her, and watched the stage, hunched and brooding. The harlequinade had begun. *Nedda* as *Columbine*, *Beppe* as *Harlequin*, were feasting on papier-mâché food and toasting each other in colored water for wine, plotting their flight. The *Harlequin* leaped gayly through the window as *Punchinello* approached. The tragedy of the little comedy had begun.

Billy Carseme leaned forward and watched the scene, absorbed, his heavy lips moving a little as if he said to himself the words of the singers, and got a special meaning from them.

"*Pagliaccio non son*—" sang the broken-hearted clown, and wept, his painted face covered by his long, white, flapping sleeves.

"Shall we go, Billy?" asked Linda impatiently. But he shook his head.

The clown was singing again:

"I dreamt thou wast true!

Would I had never known thee!

Broken is my heart."

"Let's go," urged Linda. "I hate the crush downstairs, and the wait."

But Billy Carseme sat still, listening to the clown, terrible in his fury, his dagger gleaming, his painted mouth of laughter distorted into a murderous grimace.

"*Il nome! Il nome!* His name—thy lover's name!"

And now came *Nedda*'s dying cry of agonized appeal:

"*Soccorso—Silvio*—"

And the clown, savagely rejoiced that she had betrayed the name of her lover at the last, takes his second victim with one powerful, deep thrust of his bloody dagger. Linda turned away her head. She hated violence. She did not look again even when *Canio*'s poor

5—Ains.

last words roll out in piteous stupefaction to the crowd:

"*La commedia è finita.* The comedy is finished."

And she had turned for her cloak before the applause had fairly begun. Billy did not help her with it, and she shrugged herself into it, careless of his indifference. In silence they descended the stairs, waited for the car, and started through the traffic crush of Broadway.

Indeed they were halfway uptown before Billy seemed to be aware of her, and when he spoke it was to himself as much as to her.

"It was a mistake to kill the woman, too," he said slowly.

Linda did not answer. She hardly heard him, for she was fathoms deep in her own thoughts, her fingers still closed tightly over the vanity case which held the little golden key. She was on her way to Fléming, to-morrow.

"Yes, it was a mistake to kill the woman, too," went on Billy. "I suppose he had to do it to get the name of her lover out of her, but if he'd known that, the thing to do would have been to kill the man."

Linda heard him now.

"I'm afraid it's too late to change the opera in accordance with your pleasant little scheme of ethics," she offered airily.

Billy turned and looked at her.

"Cheap sarcasm, Linda," he said. "That's about all I get from you these days. Cheap sarcasms, evasions, shifts. What did you ever marry me for? Was it because of the money?"

"Do you feel like King Cophetua, Billy? I wasn't quite the beggar maid, you know. No, it wasn't the money. I hardly know what it was. Probably it was because you wanted so much to marry me. You kept every one else away, and it was my third season, and, of course, there was the money. Such

a lot. And the sapphires. I'd always wanted to wear big sapphires."

He caught her wrist heavily, and she adroitly shifted the vanity case to her other hand.

"Linda, what are you? Just a lovely colored fruit, all rotten inside? Is it this lazy, decadent life you women lead, with nothing to think about except your beauty, that has made you so? I never hear you talk about anything but frocks and beauty shops and jewels. I can't see that you do anything but mess about with truck like that. And yet you must have a soul *somewhere!* If you haven't, why should I love you and want you so, want what you might be? Have you got a soul, Linda, or are you just a lovely fleshliness, with no regard for honor and decency and integrity?"

"Billy, dear"—she was laughing, and she did not try to get her wrist away from his heavy hand—"what phrases you make to-night! You'll have to go to the opera oftener. It inspires you."

"You see," he went on, as if he had not heard her, "I want to know. It's the uncertainty that tortures. If I knew, I'd know what to do, like *Pagliaccio*, poor devil! When he was sure that his wife had a lover, he used his dagger. But not until he was sure."

She struck through his words with sudden contempt.

"Well, what has this got to do with you and me, Billy? If I had a lover, would you take a dagger and stab him, singing maledictions all the time, whilst I stood by, with sounds of harmonious woe and despair? How funny you are!"

The car ran smoothly up before the house and stopped. The footman came around smartly to open the door and Billy lumbered out, clumsily as usual. Her lip curled in a little mocking smile as she thought of the lithe dexterity of Edgar Fleming's body, the sureness of his movements. And then she had remembered again George Hughes' thrust

and she wondered whether or not Fleming actually did wear a toupee. George could think of the most diverting bits of malice, things of which only the most feline of women were usually guilty. She strolled across the pavement, wrapping her furs about her, still smiling. Perhaps to-morrow she would know about the toupee. But she wondered if she would like Edgar quite so well if she found out it was true.

"Night, Billy," she said, yawning, at the door of her room.

Jane was waiting, and Linda gave herself over peacefully to her care. She slipped out of her golden gown and watched her slimness in the glass to see if she had gained an ounce, anywhere; if there was any dreaded thickening about the waist or at the back of the armpits, where women are always apt to get stout and ugly. She looked critically at the back of her neck. Heavens, if she should grow a lump there, as so many women do! She spanned her ankle with her finger and thumb, looked at the flesh on the back of her hands to see if she could find any lack of freshness. Her nails shone like rosy jewels, but not too bright. She had her quick bath, her light massage, her cup of hot milk, her hair was shaken down, rubbed with silk, plaited with a ribbon, and in a delicious drowsiness she slipped at last between the thin freshness of the sheets, embroidered by patient nuns in bare convent rooms. Jane flung over her the quilted satin of her down coverlet, turned off the light, vanished.

She lay there steeped in the delicious drowsiness which is neither sleep nor waking, but on the borderland—a borderland of dreams and fancies. The dreams were all of Edgar Fleming and of the moment when to-morrow she would put the golden key in that heavy door of his and swing it open. He would be waiting, as before, waiting in the hallway. His arms would be wait-

ing for her beauty. She dreamed it all, wrapped in the delight of it, half stupefied, unconscious.

There were faint sounds in the house, but she could not tell whether she dreamed them, or whether they were real, and she could not rouse herself to care. She did not know how long she had lain so when a sound a little nearer, more intrusive, roused her. It seemed that some one had entered her room, was fumbling over the top of the dressing table stealthily, in the dark. Then there were steps again, and the door closed softly. It was the closing of the door that brought her wide awake, startled.

A burglar—probably with a gun. She lay absolutely, painfully still, and listened, her eyes straining in the darkness, her heart pumping great, noisy throbs of blood through her, so noisy she knew that if there was some one there he would surely hear them. At last she put out a cautious hand, pulled the switch of her bedside lamp, sat up swiftly, prepared to jump and scream. Screams ached in her throat for utterance.

But the room was empty, reassuringly familiar. Jane had made all tidy for the night, and it was as she had left it. The door was shut—or was it just a little ajar? Linda was not afraid now, so she dropped her feet into her slippers and went to the door. It was not quite tightly latched, and she had a moment's resumption of alarm. But only a moment. There was nothing, no one. It was a noise in the street she had heard.

But at last she opened the door and looked into the hall. All was still; the high light which was left there all night burned as usual, there was no sign of any intruder. And there was a light in Billy's room, which further reassured her. Probably he was sitting up reading, as he so often did. Billy had been known to read all night long.

For a moment she thought she would go and open Billy's door and see him lying there on his bed, his pajamas open at his swarthy, thick throat, books and magazines and newspapers heaped about him. But Billy had been in such a queer mood this evening, inclined to be troublesome. She drew back into her own room, shut the door, slipped into bed.

After an appreciable wait, she fell asleep again, and now she dreamed again, a strange, fantastic dream of "Pagliacci," with George Hughes a leering, hateful *Tonio*, Edgar Fleming as *Silvio*, Billy as *Canio*, and herself in the velvet bodice and gay petticoat of *Nedda*. They were not on the stage; they seemed far off, a little, isolated group, intent on one another, the three men quarreling over her, and she taking her way among them carelessly, seeking only her own pleasure, careless of her safety even while she was aware of the flames of danger about her. Droll, to see Billy in *Canio's* white suit with the wide, flapping sleeves. Droll, to see Edgar as *Silvio*, the handsome, tempting village lad. And there was George, weak, desirous, trying to be near her. She struck him across the face with the whip, as *Nedda* strikes *Tonio*, and laughed to see his chagrin, his humiliation.

But now *Canio* was threatening her, brandishing the dagger. She tried to cry out, to call for help. He had turned from her, thrown her aside, and had rushed on *Silvio*, and now she screamed in good earnest, screamed—screamed — screamed — and woke screaming. Actually she had slept all night through, only to be wakened at last by this cruel dream.

It was daylight, late morning. The clock said eleven, and she lay among her pillows exhausted from the nightmare which had gripped her, too exhausted to think or feel anything except relief for the escape into wakeful-

ness. And then, through her exhaustion and her relief, came a flash of warning. The key! The little golden key! It was almost as if some one had called out the words to her.

She got out of bed and went to her dressing table, white with panic. How had she been so incredibly stupid as to forget to put the key under her pillow as she had intended! She sighed and caught at her heart when she saw the vanity case untouched in the tray of gilded wood which held such trinkets. It was safe, then. Yet her fingers shook as she opened it, shook in spite of herself.

The key was gone. The key and its bit of rose ribbon. With frantic fingers she searched the corners of the vanity case, daubing her hands with rouge and powder, tumbling out all its tinkling baubles in wild confusion. She flung open the dressing-table drawers, searching, tearing, tossing into maddest disorder the neatness of Jane's care.

But the key was gone.

She looked over the floor, she ran into her dressing room, she dragged down the gown and coat she had worn the night before, tore them from their muslin, perfumed cases, shook them, dragged at them, only to fling them aside at last.

It was all useless. The key was gone. Perhaps she had dropped it in the car. She ran back to the telephone now. But her hand fell away from it, and she had a moment of forced self-control. Above all things she must be cautious. It was absurd to be so panic-stricken. The key would turn up in a moment. She ran her agonized hands among her pillows—had she forgotten and put it there after all? She flung the pillows on the floor, pulled at their lace, shook the coverlet, the sheets, then flung them all back on the bed. For she must look at the floor next, inch by inch. She dropped on the floor, dragged herself over it, did not rest

until she had felt every inch of the carpet, pulled at the velvet floor cushions.

But the key was not there.

So intent was she on her search that she did not hear the door open, and was not aware that Billy was in the room until he spoke. Then she looked up at him, wide-eyed, frantic in her dishevelment and distress.

"You've missed it, have you?" said Billy, and his heavy face twitched queerly. "Well, here it is. And here's something else you might like to see."

He flung an afternoon newspaper down on the floor beside her, an extra, damp from the press, smudged, inky. But the headline stood out:

WELL-KNOWN CLUBMAN MYSTERIOUSLY MURDERED.

EDGAR FLEMING SHOT DEAD IN HIS OWN HOME EARLY THIS MORNING. NO CLEW TO THE MURDERER.

Followed an incoherent block of type which she could not read. It swam and danced before her dilated eyes. She could only look up dumbly from the newspaper at the man standing before her.

"You!" she said, half whispering. "You did it. You—murdered him! You'll go to the chair for this, Billy."

"No one saw me," he said. "No one will suspect me—there are too many other men with just as much cause to kill him as I had. I wasn't sure until last night, Linda. But George Hughes told me—about the women who had keys—and then somehow I knew why you held on to your vanity case so hard."

She stared up at him, hating him, hating his strength, his inexorable purpose.

"But I'll give you up, Billy," she said. "I'll testify against you. I'll telephone the police—now—"

"Oh, no you won't!" he said drearily.

"You're too selfish for that. The scandal would cost you too much—your place in the sun, Linda. You'd be hounded out of New York, you'd lose everything you care about and enjoy. I know damned well that you'd never pay a price like that voluntarily. No, no, my dear, you'll be as shocked and surprised *and as silent* as all the rest of the women who had his little golden keys. Why, you little fool, you didn't love him! All you wanted was excitement, sensation. Can I see you risking publicity, scandal, or anything that would cause you a second's inconvenience and annoyance? Don't you think I counted on that—before I told you?"

She knew that it was so. She would not risk, she dared not risk—anything. She must, in fact, be very, very careful that not the slightest suspicion should attach itself to Billy. It was, she conceded, clever of him to have planned so well; he was more clever than she had ever thought.

And then, suddenly, against her will, still staring up at him, she began to laugh, to laugh as if she could never, never stop the terrible, uncontrollable, tearing laugh of hysteria and fear.

"Billy," she jerked out, between the spasms. "Billy! You! *Pagliaccio*, after all! Oh, Billy, tell me—did he—did he wear—a toupee?"



TOO LATE

TOO late I bring my heart, too late 'tis yours;
Too late I bring the true love that endures;
Too long, unthrift, I gave it here and there,
Spent it in idle love and idle song,
Youth seemed so rich, with kisses all to spare—
Too late! Too long!

Too late, oh fairy woman! Dreams and dust
Are on your hair, your face is dimly thrust
Among the flowers; and Time, that all forgets,
Even you forgets, and only I prolong
The face I love, with profitless regrets—
Too late! Too long!

Too long I tarried, and too late I come,
Oh, eyes and lips so strangely sealed and dumb!
My heart—what is it now, beloved, to you?
My love—that doth your holy silence wrong?
Ah! Fairy face, star-crowned and chrismed with dew—
Too late! Too long!

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

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"Oh, no you won't!" he said drearily.

"You're too selfish for that. The scandal would cost you too much—your place in the sun, Linda. You'd be hounded out of New York, you'd lose everything you care about and enjoy. I know damned well that you'd never pay a price like that voluntarily. No, no, my dear, you'll be as shocked and surprised *and as silent* as all the rest of the women who had his little golden keys. Why, you little fool, you didn't love him! All you wanted was excitement, sensation. Can I see you risking publicity, scandal, or anything that would cause you a second's inconvenience and annoyance? Don't you think I counted on that—before I told you?"

She knew that it was so. She would not risk, she dared not risk—anything. She must, in fact, be very, very careful that not the slightest suspicion should attach itself to Billy. It was, she conceded, clever of him to have planned so well; he was more clever than she had ever thought.

And then, suddenly, against her will, still staring up at him, she began to laugh, to laugh as if she could never, never stop the terrible, uncontrollable, tearing laugh of hysteria and fear.

"Billy," she jerked out, between the spasms. "Billy! You! *Pagliaccio*, after all! Oh, Billy, tell me—did he—did he wear—a toupee?"



TOO LATE

TOO late I bring my heart, too late 'tis yours;
Too late I bring the true love that endures;
Too long, unthrift, I gave it here and there,
Spent it in idle love and idle song,
Youth seemed so rich, with kisses all to spare—
Too late! Too long!

Too late, oh fairy woman! Dreams and dust
Are on your hair, your face is dimly thrust
Among the flowers; and Time, that all forgets,
Even you forgets, and only I prolong
The faee I love, with profitless regrets—
Too late! Too long!

Too long I tarried, and too late I come,
Oh, eyes and lips so strangely sealed and dumb!
My heart—what is it now, beloved, to you?
My love—that doth your holy silence wrong?
Ah! Fairy face, star-crowned and chrismed with dew—
Too late! Too long!

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

The Wax Duchess

By Alicia Ramsey

Author of "The Rendezvous,"
"The Marionettes," etc.



I WAS just reading the account of Camilla's sensational success when the bell rang and Camilla, herself, was shown in.

As always, she was beautifully turned out. Her sable muff with its soft ruffles of metallic chiffon and its tassels of tarnished gold was the latest thing in luxurious furs; the lines of her soft velvet suit were a joy to behold. Her bag of peacock's feathers, a riot of blue and green, was an inspiration from a French artist's dream.

From head to foot she was perfect, but, under her plumed hat, her eyes burned preternaturally bright; the sharp contours of her face were as white as if they had been carved in stone. As her furs slipped from her slim shoulders I saw, at a glance, that she had lost weight again.

Camilla threw her muff on the table and began unfastening her long gray suède gloves. She answered my thought, as she so often did,

"Six and a half pounds last month."

"In Heaven's name, Camilla, what have you been doing with yourself?"

She gave me a look which startled me.

"Feeding myself by inches to the flames of the bottomless pit of hell."

I caught her hand and held it tightly clasped within both my own.

"Oh, my dear! Things are no better then?"

I felt a shudder go through her.

"Worse."

"And all this"—I showed her the newspaper I had just been reading—"all this flattery and adulation, this amazing success of yours; does all that mean nothing to you? Doesn't it help at all?"

"Dust and ashes," she said. She dropped into a chair, laid her head back against the cushions, and shut her eyes.

Camilla and I had known each other from childhood. We had attended the same school, gone through the same college, come out at the same ball. From the day we had toddled home, hand in hand, from the dancing class, to the momentous hour when we had confided to each other our mutual passion for Frank, the red-headed elevator boy, we had borne each other's sorrows; we had shared each other's joys. We had never had a secret that the other did not know.

But, for the last six months, everything had been changed between us. We loved each other as well as ever, but the passion which had swept Camilla off her feet, that devastating fury of emotion which had raged and roared its way into her happy existence, had cut her off from everything and every one she had known and cared for before. It had swept her away even from me.

Since the first hour she had set eyes on Lynton Sturgis it was as if she had suddenly been stricken blind, deaf, and

dumb. A being set apart in a world of her own, she saw nothing except his face. She heard nothing except his voice. She could speak and think of nothing except him. I had borne it as long as I could. Then one day, it had been too-strong for me. I had told her the truth as I saw it.

"Sturgis is mad about Jane Merri-man. He cares nothing about you. He shows it in every way he can. You're making yourself the laughingstock of New York City going on as you're going, writing him letters he doesn't trouble to answer, making appointments he doesn't trouble to keep, sending him invitations he doesn't even trouble to decline. Have you no pride or self-respect left? I'd die of shame before I'd trail after a man who doesn't want me, if I were you!"

I had thought to save Camilla from Sturgis. I had only succeeded in losing her for myself. We had quarreled hideously and we had parted. Until she walked in on me that afternoon, we hadn't seen each other for weeks.

I sat and I looked at Camilla. Her beautiful color faded; her beautiful vivacity vanished. Her smile that had once come and gone like sunlight over her charming face was swallowed up in gloom. Head dropped, eyes closed, hands listlessly clasped in her lap, she sat there, the ghost of her former brilliant self.

Consumed with bitterness, I looked at her and I marveled at the madness of this passion we call love. I cursed the man who had done this thing to her. I cursed myself for having brought them together. She had met Lynton Sturgis at my house.

So there we sat, the two of us—friends for nearly twenty-one years; parted for months; and not a word to say. I wondered what were her thoughts as she lay there in her chair so silent and still. I wondered what would be the end of it all. It was a

relief when I heard the door open softly behind me and the maid brought in the tea.

I was setting about making it, English fashion, when the bell rang again and my Cousin Philip came in. Absent for over a year, he had only returned the evening before from Japan.

There is no need to describe my Cousin Philip. Everybody knows all about him. His flight upward in the motion-picture world had been one of those phenomenal things that occur only once in a generation. With his first picture he had established himself as the coming man.

He came into the room like a being from another world. It was as if the windows had suddenly been thrown open and a breath of pure wind, fresh from the sea and sweet with the tang of the salt, had blown in. Success emanated from him at every pore. It streamed out of his virile hair. It shone out of his gray eyes like a flame. The vital force which consumed him seemed to surround him like a glittering aura visible to the human eye. A greater contrast between two human beings, Camilla and him, could not well be conceived.

At sight of her, he exclaimed with delight.

"Heavings and earth! Whom have we here? The latest celeb in New York City gathered together all by itself for one small tea! What sinful waste!" He threw himself down on the couch beside her and caught her hand in his. "Wake up, Lion, and let's hear you roar!"

Camilla opened her eyes languidly and looked at him.

"Hello, Phil!" she said.

My cousin's laughter, joyous as a peal of wedding bells, rang through the quiet room.

"Is that all you have to say to a man who's been gone for over a year and traveled over fifty thousand miles?

Woman! I've brought you back a jade comb for your back hair and a little gold Buddha with ruby eyes to hang on your chain! Moreover, a pound of ye sacred tea drunk only by ye mikado himself and a fan made out of ye fevers of ye holy crane with little dingle-dangles of coral and pearl, all concealed in the depths of my best top hat! Behold! All these things have I sweated myself sick and perjured my soul to smuggle through the customs to pleasure you, and all you do is to open your eyes and say, 'Hello, Phil! In Heaven's name, what's the matter with the girl?'

I touched his foot with the tip of my slipper and threw him a warning look.

"Don't worry her, Phil. Camilla's not well."

"Not well!" he cried. "What's wrong with her?"

"You can see for yourself how terribly thin she has got. She lost six and a half pounds last month."

"Good for her!" exclaimed my cousin. "Every pound she takes off is pure joy to me! Heaven deliver me from fat women! May their puffy ankles and their obstreperous hips perish from off the face of the earth! It's a rag and a bone and a hank of hair for Little Willie, take it from me!" He took the cup I held out and offered it to Camilla. "Now then, old dear, shove along a bit and make room for me. Here's your tea."

Camilla turned her head languidly and looked at the cup.

"No tea for me."

"Thatta girl!" exclaimed my cousin, in nowise disconcerted. "Go to it! Another ounce of adipose to the good! Moreover, all the more for me!" He seized on a plate of little cakes and began devouring them. Cup in hand, with his back to the fire, he considered Camilla anew. "Don't talk to me about not being well! Woman, you're lovelier than ever! You lose another six pounds off that adorable body of yours

and you'll be just the type I want. I've got a whale of a part waiting for the right woman to blow along, a girl who's in love with three men at once and not one of the three cares a tinker's dam about her! So she stabs all three to the heart, takes pisin, and throws herself under the same train that is bringing her real lover back. Four corpses all of a row! *Wow!*

"Why the deuce don't you leave off tinkering with those infernal wax dollies of yours and put your hand in mine, Love, and come along o' me? I'll guarantee you make a million dollars a minute vamping the virtuous youths of U. S. A. on the uplifting screen!"

I took up the magazine and showed him the illustrated article dealing with the exhibition of Camilla's work.

"Tinkering with wax dollies, you call it? Read that, and prostrate yourself in the dust!"

Philip took the paper from me and ran his eye down the page, murmuring aloud:

"Most unique exhibition in years. Lost art restored. Reincarnation of the great Italian sculptor, Andrea del Rosigno, come back to life. Well, well, what do you know about that! Heyings! Is this my little Camilla whose face I once slapped when she stole my chewing gum off the bottom of my chair! Old dear, you're a wonder! I'll give this dolly parade of yours the once over first thing to-morrow or die in the attempt."

Camilla dragged herself up from her cushions as if it were an effort for her to move.

"No need for you to die, Phil. If you want to see what they're like, there's one of them in my bag over there."

Philip put down his cup and picked up the bag. He looked at it admiringly as it swung to and fro on its carved, enameled chains.

"Fevvers! As I'm a sinner! What

next? Heavens, these women! Squaws every one of 'em!"

His gray eyes sparkling with curiosity, he stood watching Camilla carefully unwrapping the folds of tissue paper from the little object she had taken out. With a quick movement of her hand, she cleared the little table beside her of its flowers and set down a little statuette.

It was about six inches in height. It was about two inches around. It stood on a small bronze pedestal about an inch high. It was a perfect representation of an up-to-date man in evening clothes, made in wax.

"Good heavens!" said Philip. "It's Sturgis!"

Sturgis it was. Sturgis, as he lived and moved and had his being. Sturgis, to the life. Sturgis, with his slim figure, his broad shoulders, his long legs. Sturgis, with his black hair rising in straight, strong curls from his square-cut brow. Sturgis, with his thin, red lips smiling out at us from under the shadow of his pointed, black beard.

His coat sat to his fine waist, as his coat always sat. His trousers fell with immaculate crease, as his trousers always fell over the instep of his pointed, patent-leather shoes. The links of his dress chain glinted like a fine thread of gold in the sunlight over his white vest of moire antique. The emerald stud which he always affected shone out from the center of his stiff shirt front, like a spark of green fire.

On his left hand, that beautiful hand of his with its long fingers and its pointed filbert nails, gleamed the little silver ring carved with strange characters in Arabic which he called his talisman. It was said to have been given him by some woman in that far-away land, who had laid down her life with joy, for one hour spent in his arms.

I had seen those strange life-size effigies of the great dead Queens of Eng-

land, hidden away in that silent upper chamber in Westminster Abbey which so few have seen. In Paris, I had been initiated by the old Baron de Rothsehild himself into the priceless collection of the small wax Del Rospigno figures, unique in the world of art. At home, here in New York, I had been shown, as a special privilege, the exquisite later work of the Sisters Casella when Julian Morgan had first brought them back with him across the seas. But never had I seen anything to compare with this work of Camilla's.

As it stood there on the little table, with the light falling from the shaded lamp on to its strange face, so life-like it was, I shouldn't have been surprised if those devil eyes of Sturgis had lifted from under their tangle of black lashes and looked at me. I shouldn't have been surprised if those thin, red lips had parted in their mocking smile and said, "*Jane!*"

We stood, the three of us, and we looked at the little wax figure, standing so consummately at its ease on its pedestal of bronze. Its very pose was the pose of Sturgis. Camilla had caught, and reproduced to perfection, the angle of his shoulder and hip, the lift of his chin, the lie of his virile hair. The lamp shone down on the table on its reduplicated reflection rising up out of the shining wood, like a dim vision seen through the medium of black glass.

We stood there, the three of us, and we looked at Sturgis. None of us spoke a word. There wasn't a sound in the room except the crackling of the logs on the hearth and the ticking of my little gold clock.

People often tell me that I am what they call "psychic." I know nothing as to that. But I do know that as I stood there, I was seized by one of those extraordinary apprehensions that "sensitives" feel, but cannot explain. I sensed a frightful calamity approaching Camilla. I longed to tear this little

wax figure off its bronze pedestal and hurl it headlong into the flames.

What was this man that he should exercise such a hideous power over her? What attraction had he that she could not have found in a dozen other men of equal distinction and wealth? It was as if his black eyes and mocking lips had laid her under a spell.

"It's wonderful, Camilla," said Philip. "Wonderful! There's only one fault to be found with it. It's so real, it's uncanny. It's not like a wax figure. It's like an unveiling of life."

"That's what it is," said Camilla softly. "An unveiling of life." Her eyes were terrible, as they looked at this thing that her soul had fashioned within her and that her own hands had brought forth.

"It's a good thing you didn't live in the Middle Ages," said Philip grimly, "or you'd have been burned for a witch."

Camilla turned her head and looked at him curiously.

"Why? Is it a crime to model the thing you love out of wax?"

"Not the thing you love," Philip answered her laughing, "but the thing you hate. You've heard of the Wax Duchess, haven't you?"

Camilla's eyes flicked in the silence. To me it was like the turning of a key in the lock of a closed door.

"The Wax Duchess? No. Who was she?"

"She was the Duchess of Gloucester. She lived five hundred years ago. She used to make little wax images like these; 'ciryrmaches' as they called them; *cire* is the French for wax, you know." He bent down and picked up the statuette, turning it carefully round and round in his hand.

"When she wanted to do any one a bad turn, she would make an exact representation of him, just like this, say a prayer to the devil, take a pin, and stick it into any part she wanted to harm. Into his foot, he became a crip-

ple. Into his hand, he lost his arm. Into his head, he lost his mind. Into his heart, he died. That's how it came to be a 'lost art,' as that chap calls it in his article about you. 'Ciryrmaching' got to be such a rage that people were forbidden to make wax figures under penalty of the law."

Under her plumed hat, Camilla looked at my cousin with her shadowy, feverish eyes.

"Is that true, or are you only making it up?"

Philip crossed his heart like the children do.

"True as Gospel. If you don't believe me, go to the library and look it up for yourself."

"And this Wax Duchess who stuck pins into her figures? Did things really happen to people she wanted to harm?"

"So they say. The reason given for Richard the Third's own wasted arm was that Jane Shore made a wax model of him and stuck pins into its arm."

"I don't believe a word of it," cried Camilla, with sudden passion. "You're only laughing at me like you laugh at everything."

"Why not," said Philip, suddenly serious. "Who shall say what's not possible in times like these? Don't we live in an age where we see the impossible made possible every hour of our lives? Aren't they teaching the very same thing in thousands of churches in America to-day? What's Christian Science except the power of suggestion? - What do they teach but the invincible power of thought? Concentrate your soul on an absent person and wish him well, they say, and he will get well. What's that but the modern application of sticking a pin into a wax model and wishing a person ill and he becomes ill?"

"I wonder," said Camilla. Her voice was a mere whisper, but I heard what she said and so did Philip.

"Let's take a chance and try it," said

he. He slipped his cameo pin out of his tie and held up the statuette. "God knows I wish this fine gentleman ill for the misery he's brought to you. Shall we stick a pin into his arm and see if he'll break it, or shall we stick a pin into his heart and see if he'll be obliging enough to die?"

With a scream, Camilla threw herself forward and tore the little figure out of Philip's hand. In the struggle, the sharp point of his pin caught in her hand and tore the delicate skin. The bright scarlet blood leaped out like a living thing and ran over the immaculate shirt front of the statuette and dyed it a bright red.

"Don't dare to touch it!" she cried fiercely. "If you'd stuck that pin into him, I'd have killed you! I love him, I tell you. I love him! He's my friend, my lover, my master—my god!" She fell on her knees beside the little table, encircling the figure with her arms, kissing it wildly, and sobbing pitifully.

I am extremely fond of my Cousin Philip—too fond, I sometimes fear, for my own peace of mind. But, at that moment, I would gladly have taken my longest hatpin and run it up to the hilt in every inch of his great, big body.

I knew, from the look in his face as he watched Camilla in her agony, he was thinking to himself what a corking fine movie she'd make.

That night was the night of the great blizzard. I lay in my bed and listened to the storm and I thought of Camilla. Somehow, the mad passion of the night, the crying of the wind, the furious intensity of the frozen rain against the windows, reminded me of her. Her wild words, her frantic tears, were typified for me in the roaring and raging of the elements let loose outside. Even in sleep, the thought of her followed me. When, toward dawn, I fell into an uneasy doze, my dreams were of her.

I thought the wax figure of Sturgis came to life. It grew and grew until it achieved his own stupendous height. His black eyes laughed at her from under his black lashes. His red lips parted in their mocking smile. "You've created me," he said in that low, caressing voice of his that I always hated; "now I'm going to destroy you!" He took the diamond pin out of her hair and stabbed her to the heart. The bright red blood flowed out of her mouth and turned to fire. I saw Camilla writhing in the flames of hell. I woke up screaming to find the telephone by my bedside ringing. It was Camilla calling me up.

"Goldie, darling, I want you! It's a beast of a day, I know, but put on your things like an angel and come out with me for a walk. If I stay in the house a minute longer, I shall go raving mad."

Even over the wire, I could hear the stress and strain in her voice. I knew as well as if she had told me that something worse than usual must have occurred. I got up, plunged into a cold bath, drank a cup of hot coffee, dressed, and went out. We met as arranged in the Park.

The instant I set eyes on Camilla, I knew my instinct was right. In the pitiless light of day, her face, white and haggard and ravaged with emotion, showed a thousand more lines and shadows than the evening before under the light of my friendly lamps with their soft, pink-silk shades.

For the first time in all the years I had known her, she was unbecomingly dressed. Her black cloth suit with its ermine collar and cuffs—masterpiece of Jenny's though it was—was the worst thing she could possibly have put on. Against the hard white line of the fur, her blanched face took on the pallor of death. The black paradise in her ermine toque sat on her raven hair like the black plumes on a hearse. With-

out a word from me, Camilla caught my thought from my eyes.

"You needn't look at me like that!" she said. "I know I look hideous. That's the reason I put on this suit. I thought perhaps I might achieve what Sturgis calls a triumph of sartorial sin!" Her lips suddenly began to tremble, and her dark eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Goldie! I've had the hell of a night! I haven't slept a wink!"

I slipped my hand into hers inside her muff.

"What happened, Camilla, to make you in such a state?"

She looked at me with the tragic anguish of a sorrowful child.

"Last night when I got back from you I rang up Sturgis. I know it's all wrong, but I had to, Goldie. I couldn't help myself. I make up my mind not to do these things and then I do them. There's something inside me here"—she put her hand to her breast—"that makes me do them. It's stronger than myself."

I bit my lips till they bled to keep back the words that burned in my mouth.

"Well, darling, and so you rang up Sturgis. Did he answer you or wasn't he in?"

"He was in, but he didn't answer me. That Japanese butler of his came to the telephone. I told him to tell Sturgis I was ill and wanted to see him." She stopped short and a look of agony came into her ravaged face. "Sturgis told the butler to tell me to go to hell."

"He didn't!" I cried out. "He didn't!"

"He did," she answered me fiercely. "I heard him. Those were his very words. 'Tell her to go to hell!' he said. Then he laughed, Goldie. I heard him. It wasn't the butler's fault. He was perfectly civil. He just said Sturgis was out and rang off. But that's what Sturgis told him to say. I heard him. 'Oh, tell her to go to hell!'"

"May God forgive him!" I said.

"God may," said Camilla slowly, "but I won't. I'll never forgive him. Never! As long as I live, I could have borne it if he'd said it to *me*, but to a Japanese butler—a servant—" She gripped hold of my hand in her muff until I could have screamed with the pain. "At first I thought I'd take one of Uncle Robert's revolvers and go to his house and wait outside till he came out and kill him. Then I thought I'd kill myself. Then I thought of a better way than either of these. I went upstairs and locked myself into the studio and worked."

"Worked?" I said blankly.

"Worked," said Camilla. "Work's wonderful, Goldie. There's nothing like it in the world. When you work you forget everything, even the man you—*hate!*" Her face changed again subtly. Into her eyes came that strange look I had noticed the day before. "Goldie, it was wonderful! The quiet room, the shaded lamp, the storm outside. Not a sound in the house. Everybody asleep except the wind and me. Did you hear it in the night, Goldie, crying outside like a lost child trying to get in? Did you hear the snow flinging itself against the panes? Like me trying to get in to Sturgis, I thought. But it couldn't get in, the poor snow. The windows were too strong for it. They kept it out."

She put her face down close to mine and began to whisper.

"I was cleverer than the snow, Goldie. I got in to Sturgis. He couldn't keep me out. I sent my thought flying through the night. It was like God. It rode upon the wings of the storm. It crept through the barred windows. It crept through the locked doors. My thought was beside him all the night. I put his little statue down on the table beside me. He stood there all night long and looked on as I worked. It was as though he was there, himself,

Goldie. Just he and I together, alone, in the silence of the night."

I tried to interrupt her, but I couldn't. She held me spellbound with her eyes.

"When dawn broke—it was done. There it stood before me, the thing that I had made with my hands. I showed it to Sturgis and he laughed at it. It was so real, I felt like Frankenstein. I shouldn't have been surprised if it had come to life and talked. Why not? I had put my whole life into the making. It was my soul that stood there before me, my soul that I'd turned to wax."

Suddenly I was horribly frightened. Her wild words, her wild looks, struck terror into my very soul. I caught hold of her arm crying to her to go home.

"You're ill, Camilla. You're raving. If you go on like this, you'll go mad. For God's sake, stop it! Come home with me, there's a darling, and get to bed and I'll sit beside you and read you to sleep."

"Sleep!" cried Camilla. "It's not sleep I want, but life. Red life, raw life! Life that makes you strong and young. Life that makes you forget!" She put her hand through my arm and began pulling me along the path. "Walk!" she said to me fiercely. "Walk, I tell you. If I stand still here any longer talking, I shall go raving mad!"

So we walked.

Never, as long as I live, shall I forget that walk of ours through the Park. It comes back to me even now, sometimes, in my dreams. The ground inches deep in snow. The sky full of sullen slow-moving clouds as gray and as heavy as lead. The black trees bowing and bending in torture under their blinding pall of white. The piercing, biting cold which went through and through you like a knife.

Usually at such an hour there would have been many people about. But that day the place was deserted. As far as the eye could see there was nothing except snow. There wasn't a sound to

be heard. The desolation of it and the silence made my heart go cold.

The storm, coming as it had on the top of a three-weeks frost, had left the ground like glass. I slipped and slid along beside Camilla, expecting every minute that one of us would fall and break an arm or leg. But Camilla went swiftly forward with apparently no effort at all. Head up, eyes fixed, lips tightly compressed, she walked as if she trod on air. There was something almost inhuman about the way she moved over the snow, as if some secret purpose, unknown to me, upheld her feet and sustained her strength.

She leading, I following, on and on we went; along the drive, past the reservoir, down by the fir trees, until we came to the lake. There she stopped. No need for her to tell me why she had come there. No need for her to tell me her thought. I knew it as well as she.

Only a year before, we had gone there together, she and I, with a merry crowd of our friends. The sky had been blue that day. The sun had shone out. The Park had resounded to our gay laughter and the ringing of our skates. Sturgis had sent down a band and to its gay waltzes and fox-trots we had danced and skated till we were ready to drop. He had no eyes for any one but Camilla that day, Camilla with her happy eyes laughing out over her sables and his red roses at her waist. They had danced and skated together the whole morning. We had, all of us, expected that before we went home their engagement would be announced.

Then Jane Merriman had suddenly appeared on the scene, driving a little Old-World Dutch sleigh of scarlet wood drawn by a Shetland pony about the size of a big Newfoundland dog. Its mane was tied up with red ribbons. Its arched neck jinkled and jangled with little brass bells. Its tail, as long as itself, swept the ground. It was the

most fantastic thing you ever saw in your life.

Jane, who didn't know what fear meant, drove the pretty creature straight down the slope right on to the ice itself. When she jumped out and showed herself dressed as a Dutch boy, with peaked cap and ballooning trousers and a clay pipe stuck upside down in her mouth, all the men went mad about her, Sturgis worst of all. The novelty of the thing; the daring of her; the chic of her, caught his jaded fancy. From that moment he had eyes for no one but Jane. All the rest of the day they had skated together; jumping, racing, doing the wildest stunts; while Camilla stood shivering on the bank waiting for Sturgis to come. When we left, Jane drove him back in her sleigh. But for my cousin and me, Camilla would have been left to go home alone.

Heartless, faithless Sturgis! Heavens, how I hated the man!

As if my thought had evoked him, suddenly the sound of tinkling bells rang out on the still, chill air. I turned my head sharply and I saw a sleigh coming quickly toward us down the road. It was the smartest turnout; the black horses matched up to a hair, silver bells round their necks, gay scarlet rosettes streaming at their heads. At the back sat a groom with arms tightly folded, European fashion, a cockade in his hat.

In the driver's seat sat Lynton Sturgis, his great fur collar turned up round his neck, his sealskin cap set jauntily over his ear. Beside him, smothered in furs to her chin, sat Jane.

They must have seen us at the same moment I saw them, for I could hear Jane shouting to Sturgis to stop. He pulled up his horses with an iron hand. The sleigh stopped dead. The groom ran to the horses' heads and threw their monogrammed cloths over their streaming backs. Jane jumped out of the sleigh.

In New York, that city of generous chivalry and easy standards, Jane Merriman easily passed for a beauty. Her bright eyes, her smart clothes, her sharp tongue, and her father's millions established her a popular favorite from her first coming out. But I had never admired her. To me, she smacked of the vulgar. Her laugh was too loud. Her clothes were too fine. Her self assurance too boisterous to suit my simple ideas. It had always been a matter of amazement to me that such a second-rate personality could appeal so strongly to Lynton Sturgis, a man of super fastidious refinement and taste.

That day, however, I realized my mistake. As she stood there in the snow, her pink cheeks whipped scarlet by the wind, her dazzling teeth flashing white behind her cherry lips, her black eyes dancing and snapping with health and happiness, she was the most beautiful thing I had ever beheld. Youth and the joy of life seemed to flow out of her like a life-giving stream.

Her suit was red; her gloves were black. Round her neck a string of scarlet beads flashed and flamed down to her knees where her skirt stopped short. Her slim, young legs in their sheer silk stockings were incased in high, black boots, edged with fur and fastened with tassels of red. On her short, crisp curls she wore a wisp of black velvet, twisted into a turban, with a scarlet bird perched on the top. It screamed to heaven, that bird, with its outstretched wings of fire. Not another woman in New York City would have dared to wear such a hat.

Suddenly, I understood why Sturgis had chosen her instead of Camilla. Beside that vivid personality Camilla's distinction and fragile beauty not only failed to register, as Philip would say; they simply ceased to exist.

Jane came flying toward us joyously swinging her skates over her arm.

"Hullo, people!" she cried. "So

you've beat us to it! Where are your skates?"

I forced my lips, trembling with cold, to give her an answering smile.

"We're not skating to-day."

"Not skating?" Her eyes, avid with curiosity, flashed from my face to Camilla's and back again to mine. "Then, in the name of all that's holy, what are you doing out here?"

"We're taking a walk," I said.

"A walk!" she screamed. She burst out laughing, waving her arms at Sturgis and shouting to him to come. "How much longer, old thing? Come over here and hear the latest!"

Sturgis threw the reins to the groom and got slowly out of the sleigh. In that leisurely, indolent way of his, he came toward us, baring his head as he came. In his fur coat he looked simply gigantic. I hated the man like poison, but there was no doubt about it, he was terribly attractive, as graceful and as treacherous as a cat.

Cap in hand, he stood beside us, his black curls blowing in the wind in a kind of black aureole round his well-shaped head.

Jane pounced on him in her vivacious way, shaking him by the arm.

"What d'ye know about it, Sturgie! These two crazy nuts aren't going skating. They're out for a little walk."

"Indeed?" said Sturgis in his insolent drawl. "And what is walking? Is it some new kind of sport?"

"Yes," I said tartly. "You should try it! It's excellent; guaranteed to keep one healthy, happy, and warm. You should get some attractive girl to show you, so you won't consider the time wasted." It was a petty thing to say, but I was so mad I couldn't help myself.

"Miaouw!" said Jane and her cheeks went crimson. "Listen to the little cat!"

Sturgis only smiled.

"It must be charming," he drawled.

"One has only to look at you both to see the happy results." His merciless eyes fastened themselves on to Camilla's miserable white face. "Camilla looks quite radiant with joy and cold."

"Cold," screamed Jane; "I'm frozen!" She began stamping her small feet in their high, black boots up and down in the snow. The little red tassels flashed gayly to and fro as she capered about. "How much longer are we going to stand here yapping? I thought we came out here for you to teach me that new step."

Sturgis took off his fur coat and pitched it into the sleigh.

"If you attempt that step in those ridiculous boots you'll break your legs."

"I'll look after my legs," cried Jane, "if you'll leave off staring at Camilla and look after me. Come on! We've only an hour before lunch." She caught him by the arm and began dragging him away. She looked back over her shoulder, shouting to us at the top of her voice, "If you sillies change your minds, just hop into that old bus and the man can take you to fetch your skates."

She spoke as if Sturgis and all that belonged to him were already hers.

Side by side, Camilla and I stood there watching the two of them plowing and plunging their way down the slippery slope. During the whole of the short interview, Camilla hadn't spoken. But my arm was black and blue where she had clutched it. I knew what she had been enduring. I was afraid to look at her face. We stood there in the ghastly silence, looking down at the lake.

Sullen and secret, it lay below us like a mirror of black glass. The very silence seemed fraught with evil. The handle of the broom left behind by the men after sweeping the ice stuck up out of a pile of snow like a grave-digger's spade out of a grave. The rising wind whistled through and

through me. Suddenly the snow began to fall. All at once, I felt I couldn't stand it any longer.

"Come away, Camilla, there's a darling. Come away and let's go home."

"Not yet," she said fiercely. "Not yet. First, I must see them skate."

As she spoke, Jane and Sturgis appeared on the lake below. The clinking and clanking of their skates came up to us as, hand in hand, they swept out on to the ice.

Glorious skaters, both of them, they began doing the drop waltz. Now flinging together, now flying apart, now leaping feet high into the air. Their two figures, circling and flashing through the flurry of whirling flakes were so fantastically beautiful I forgot even Camilla for the moment in pure joy at the sight. Their movements were so swift that the scarlet bird in Jane's black turban seemed to spread his wings and fly in circles round her head.

All at once Camilla began talking in a queer kind of whisper as if she were thinking aloud.

"Last year it was I with whom he was skating. It was I whom he was teaching the new step. His arm was round my waist. It was my hand he held in his. When we got to the turn of the lake, he bent down and he kissed me." She clutched hold of my arm and she began to tremble. "Look, Goldie, look! He's going to kiss her now!"

I tried to turn my eyes away, but I couldn't. I simply had to look. They were doing the new step, a kind of Apache dance just introduced by the Hippodrome. It was said to be the most dangerous thing ever attempted on skates.

They bent, they swayed; they swirled, they swooped; they advanced and retreated all in a breath. They crouched till they were on a level with the ice. They flung themselves madly into the air. Face to face, their hands around

their knees, they slid their legs back and forth in a frenzy of movement. On the tips of their skates, they whizzed in furious circles up and down the lake.

For the first time I realized the stupendous power which lay behind Sturgis and his languid ways. He had a physique of iron and steel. His huge figure, pursuing Jane over the ice in leaps and bounds, would have been monstrous, if it hadn't been sublime.

Suddenly, he stopped dead in his tracks and held out his arms. Without an instant's hesitation, Jane hurled herself at him like a tigress and locked her hands behind his head. With one sharp movement of his lithe shoulders he lifted her sheer off her feet. With his hands on his hips, he began gyrating slowly, gradually gaining momentum until her slim body, stiff as a ramrod, lay out horizontally on the air, while he whirled her round and round his head.

As they whirled, suddenly he began to shout. It was the shout of the conqueror returning from victory. It was the shout of the beast who had made his kill. It was the call of primitive man to primeval woman!

The blinding snow, the bitter wind, those red skirts flying, that crazy shouting! It was so strangely barbaric, so wildly savage, it set something loose in me that I had never felt before. I understood what it was in Sturgis that inspired such a fury of passion in two such totally different women as Camilla and Jane.

As she dropped to her feet, Sturgis caught Jane in the sweep of his arm. Her hat fell off. Her curls fell down. She put up her hand and pulled his face down to hers. Sturgis kissed her. Jane looked up at us, waved her hand to Camilla, and laughed.

It was a cruel thing to do and very like Jane. I felt positively sick with disgust and rage.

"Hateful cat! I hope she sprains

her ankle!" I said furiously. "Serve her right if she does!"

"Why her ankle?" said Camilla softly. "While you're about it, why not her leg?"

Something in her voice startled me. I turned and looked at Camilla. She was transformed. Her eyes were sparkling like black diamonds. Two bright patches of crimson flamed on her thin, white face. Her pretty dimples began to dance in the hollows of her cheeks. It was like a ghost coming back to life.

Suddenly she began to laugh; strange laughter, inhuman laughter! Peal after peal, it rang out on the still, cold air. The sound of that crazy merriment startled even Jane. She shouted up to ask what was the joke.

"On you, dear Jane. On you!" Camilla called down to her, laughing.

Still laughing, she turned on her heel and walked away. She leading, I following, we went back the way we had come. I slipping and sliding miserably beside her; Camilla, with that strange look still on her face, moving swiftly over the snow as if she were walking on air.

At the Park gates, we met a taxi miserably crawling along the Avenue. We hailed it and got in. Hand in hand we sat there shivering, not speaking a word. When we reached Camilla's house, I followed her up the steps as a matter of course. But when the man opened the door, she put out her hand and prevented me from following her in.

"To-morrow, dear Goldie. Not now. To-morrow."

She swept up the stairs leaving me standing petrified with amazement on the mat.

The butler who had known me for years, abjectly apologetic, shut the door in my face. I went home strangely perturbed.

I was still more perturbed when a
6—Ains.

friend rang me up that evening to tell me Jane Merriman had slipped on the ice that morning, skating with Lynton Sturgis, and had broken her leg.

Camilla had said "To-morrow," but, as the Spaniards say, "To-morrow never comes!" It didn't for Camilla and me. I thought when we parted that I would see her next day. As it turned out, I didn't see her again for nearly two months.

The greater part of that time was spent by Camilla in bed with a nervous breakdown; by me, in Boston, nursing back to health my father who had been taken suddenly ill.

For a time, I found life sufficiently distracting, torn with anxiety between the two beings I loved best in the world. Gradually, however, the news of Camilla became more reassuring. Her aunt gave me her latest bulletins, night and morning, over the long-distance telephone.

Camilla's pulse was slowing up. Camilla's nerves were quieting down. Camilla was sleeping the night through without the aid of drugs.

She was sitting up. She had eaten a soft-boiled egg. She had ceased losing weight. She was taking an interest in clothes.

"I believe she's getting over that dreadful affair at last! If only we can get her away to Europe without her seeing that hateful wretch again, I believe she'll come back to us cured, Goldie dear," said Camilla's aunt one night. I could hear her crying with joy over the telephone. I only hoped we might accomplish it. My cousin's letters, unhappily, were less satisfactory.

I saw Camilla yesterday for a few minutes, all white lace and rubies, with red roses in her hair. She's as beautiful as ever, but different; her eyes have changed. Her aunt says she's getting over Sturgis. She isn't, take it from me. She has got that figure of his on a little table, rigged up like an altar, with a lace cloth and flowers and candles and

one of those little brass pots with holes in the top that you burn pastilles in. I asked her if she prayed to him, "her god," you remember? "Black Mass!" she said. Pretty swift considering it was Camilla; what say you? Damnable beast! I'd like to kick him. I hear he's dropped Jane Merriman now, who's lost her looks since she broke her leg. They say she went out, like a fool, and danced before it was properly set. The doctors aren't sure she'll ever walk right again. I should worry! After the way she treated Camilla, for my part, she can go through the rest of her life without any legs at all!

I returned to the city to find an invitation awaiting me to a tea dance for that same afternoon. It was given by the owners of the galleries where Camilla's exhibition had been held, and it was to celebrate her success. At the bottom of the card, in Camilla's handwriting, were the words:

Come early and help me receive.

For once I failed Camilla. My cousin, who was to be my escort, was held up at a conference and we got to the reception to find the beautiful rooms crowded with people and the dancing in full swing.

"Some jant!" said my cousin, joyously shouldering his way through the throng. "They've got the atmosphere all right. But where's the star?"

As he spoke, I heard the sound of a woman's laughter. Delicious laughter, sweet and clear, like the sound of running water. There was only one woman in New York City who laughed like that.

"She's in there," I said.

Philip, who respects nothing, unhooked the crimson cords which roped off an arched doorway marked "Private!" He pulled me through the velvet curtains after him. I found myself in the room beyond.

It was a large room, with a dome-shaped ceiling, lit by softly shaded lamps. The floor was green. The walls were bare. In a semicircle round the room, on high black pedestals, stood the fifty little wax figures on exhibition,

with bright red labels attached to show they had all been sold.

In the center of the room, in a high-backed chair, on a kind of dais, sat Camilla with Sturgis by her side. They were looking at something which stood on a little black ebony table between her and him.

The light on his face as he looked at Camilla told me all I wanted to know and more. He was crazy about her again. Small wonder if he was!

As she sat there, leaning her charming head against the red velvet cushion, her beautiful hands with their tapering wrists stretched out along the arms of her chair, the delicate line of her white throat rising up out of her dress like a flower, the color coming and going on her face like a flame, small wonder if Sturgis was mad about her. She was enough to send any man mad.

Where all the rest of us wore beads and bangles, she was bare of ornament as the palm of her hand. Where all the rest of us had our skirts to our knees, her gown of cramoisie velvet flowed round her feet in opulent, blood-red waves. Where all the rest of us were bedecked with feathers and plumes, she wore no hat at all. Her hair, dressed in some strange new fashion, stood out like black wings on either side of her head.

Not a flower; not a jewel! Not a bead; not a bow! It was a triumph of personality.

It was Jane and her Dutch sleigh over again.

The instant Camilla looked at me, I knew what Philip had meant when he said that her eyes were changed. They were glorious with color, luminous with light, but they were different. All the softness and sweetness had gone out of them. They were as bright and as hard as nails. She held out her arms and I ran to her.

"My Goldie! At last!" she said. She caught me to her and kissed me

fondly as ever. But even her kiss was different. Her lips on my cheek burned me as if I had been scorched with flame. As she released me, I saw what they had been looking at.

On the little black table stood a little wax figure, the figure of a woman, tall and slim and beautiful, with a kind of inhuman beauty. She had the saddest, wickedest face I ever beheld.

The folds of her red velvet gown flowed round her slender figure in opulent, blood-red waves. Her black hair stood out on either side of her head, like two great black wings. Her dark eyes, as they looked out of her waxen face, were as bright and as hard as nails.

"Hevings!" cried Philip. "Whom have we here? The Duchess of Gloucester, by all that's unholy!"

"The Wax Duchess!" Camilla said. Sturgis turned his head in that insolent way of his as if it were a condescension on his part even to speak.

"Why the Wax Duchess?" he drawled.

Camilla looked at him from under her eyes and yawned.

"You tell him, Phil. I'm tired."

She leaned back in her chair, fanning herself languidly, while Philip explained: A new possession, that fan! It was screen-shaped and made of red feathers with a little round mirror set in the heart of the plumes. It was a replica of the one that swung by a frail gold chain by the side of the wax figure. I wondered where it had come from, that fan. Sturgis, I feared.

"You copied the figure from the old print at the Museum, of course," Philip said.

Camilla yawned again.

"I never went near the Museum. I didn't even know there was an old print. I did it out of my head."

"But the thing's exact!" exclaimed my cousin. "Face, hair, dress, fan—everything's just as it is in the picture. All she needs is the pin."

"That's easily remedied," said Sturgis laughing. He slipped the pin out of his tie, a tiny black opal, pear-shaped and set with diamonds. He tucked it deftly between the little wax finger and thumb.

"A black pin for a black deed," said Camilla and she looked at Sturgis. "If you're stabbed to the heart to-night, I take you all to witness it was you who gave her the pin, not I."

At that moment, the band in the gallery struck up a waltz. My cousin who was dancing mad called to me to hurry up and come. But Camilla stopped me.

"I haven't seen her for eight weeks, Phil. The next one, if you like. This dance belongs to me."

Philip went away grumbling. I sat down on the velvet divan, waiting for Sturgis to go.

To my surprise, they went on talking. I realized, with a kind of horrible shock, I didn't exist for them. He was asking her to sell him the figure of the Wax Duchess.

"I'll write you a check for whatever sum you name, for whatever charity you like, Camilla. Have it I must."

Camilla looked at him over the top of her fan.

"You didn't trouble to buy one of the other fifty. Why this one, more than the rest?"

"It looks like you."

No words can describe the way he said it. Satan must have spoken in just such a voice when he tempted Eve. I hated Sturgis with every drop of blood in my body, but, if he had asked me for something with that sound in his voice, with that look in his eyes, I doubt if I should have had the strength to refuse.

"Come," he repeated; "sell it to me." Camilla shook her head.

"I've told you it's not for sale."

"Then give it to me!" His black eyes, as he looked at her, burned out of

his white face like two black flames.
"Give it to me."

A great silence fell on Camilla, a silence so pregnant with emotion you could almost see the clash of her secret thoughts warring in the impalpable air. I prayed with all the strength that was in me that she would refuse him. I held my breath to hear what she was going to say.

The fifty little wax figures on their black pedestals seemed to me to be listening, too. The sound of the music came floating through the curtains, tearing at one's very heart. It was just like a scene out of a play.

"Come," said Sturgis. "Be generous, Camilla. Give it to me!"

Camilla turned her head, and she smiled at him.

"I'll give it to you as a present on your wedding day."

Lower Sturgis bent his dark head and lower, until his face was on a level with hers.

"I shall ask you for a gift far more precious than the Wax Duchess on my wedding day, Camilla."

"What's that?" she said.

"The gift of your sweet, white self, my love." No other man in New York City would have dared to say it, but Sturgis said it. It was his boast that if a man knew the right way to say things, there was nothing he couldn't say.

Camilla laughed.

"My white body and your black heart! They would make a wonderful coupling, Sturgis, wouldn't they? We would make a beautiful pair."

"Not a pair," he whispered in her ear, but I heard him. "One."

His voice was more revealing than the most intimate kiss. Their eyes, as they looked at each other, more furiously impassioned than the most passionate embrace.

Suddenly, I began to shake all over. My one thought was how to get away

before they remembered that I was there. I couldn't have been more embarrassed, if I had come upon them locked in each other's arms.

I slid to the end of the couch and slipped out through the velvet curtains. In my confusion, I stumbled against some one sitting just on the other side. I looked round to apologize and I found myself staring down into Jane Merriman's face.

I was so taken aback that I just stood there staring at her, not speaking a word. The change in her was unbelievable. She looked years older. Her eyes were dull. Her beautiful color was gone. Her face was livid under her smart, black hat.

"Good gracious! What's the matter? You're ill!" I exclaimed.

Jane laughed.

"Not ill, old dear. I'm dying!"

"Dying!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"If I am, I've only myself to blame. I'm running a temperature of a hundred and two and I've a pain in my chest like a knife. I got out of my bed to come here to-day."

"You must be mad!" I cried.

Jane laughed with something of her old recklessness.

"I should worry! I am like Sturgis. I'd rather be dead and at peace than alive and not get the thing I want."

Suddenly, I was horribly sorry for Jane. So young, so pretty, so full of life! And to go to pieces like that.

"I'm sorry," I found myself saying; "I'm sorry. I wish I could do something to help."

She snatched at my hand, gave it a squeeze, and flung it away.

"That's nice of you, old dear, but nobody can help me! She's got him all right. Do you wonder? In that new get-up and a crippled old hag like me! Small blame to him, say I. God," she cried out, "what is there in him that makes us like this? He's bad through

and through. I know it. And yet, life without him is not worth the snap of a finger to me! Queer, isn't it?" She gave me a penetrating smile, caught hold of my arm, and dragged herself up to her feet. "Damn this leg of mine! Be a good sport, old thing, and help me to get out of here before those two come out!"

Stumbling, I got her down the stairs and out of the place. My cousin's car stood at the door. I made her get in.

"What does it matter whose car it is? He can take yours. If you stand out here in this wind, you'll get pneumonia."

Jane laughed drearily.

"If I die, it's not pneumonia that'll have killed me. It's she!"

Her poor, little, withered face, under her immense ostrich plumes, as she waved to me through the window, haunts me yet.

I'm no mental scientist, but that night I concentrated my whole soul on Jane's getting well. I'm no great hand at praying, but that night I prayed as I had never prayed before.

I suppose I don't know how to concentrate. Perhaps, I don't know how to pray. Anyway, forty-eight hours after, Jane Merriman died of pneumonia.

The day she was buried, Camilla's engagement to Sturgis was announced.

Camilla was married in May, that month of unlucky marriages, but she wasn't superstitious; she said. I was maid of honor, against my own wishes. Philip, much to his own disgust, was best man.

The wedding was gorgeous. Thousands of presents, hundreds of guests, jewels worth millions, singers from the Metropolitan, flowers from the South, the cathedral packed from doors to altar steps—one of those weddings talked about for years.

Camilla, in her white satin gown and

her old-lace veil, was a vision of loveliness, out of a fairy tale. Sturgis, with his black hair and his eyes, his terrific height, and his wonderful air of being something quite different from any one else, was a pretty good imitation, I thought, of a fairy prince. As they stood before the old bishop, the truth of Camilla's own words came back to me. They did, indeed, make "a wonderful pair."

What were her thoughts, I wondered, as she stood there beside him, his pearls on her neck, his kiss on her lips, his ring on her hand. Did she love him or did she hate him? Was she remembering the day he told his butler to send her to hell? Or was she dreaming of the rapture of love awaiting her in his arms? Was she cursing her own weakness that could not resist him? Or was she exulting over dead Jane in her grave?

The sun came streaming through the great window above them. It turned Camilla's white gown to a passion of scarlet. Their hands, as Sturgis put on the ring, were dyed blood-red. The shaft of unholy light followed them down the church as Camilla swept down the aisle on her husband's arm.

An evil, evil omen it seemed to me! I wasn't the only one to notice that strange portent. My cousin spoke to me of it when we were dancing later.

"Some light effect, kid! That old saint up in the window knows his business all right. I'll say he does! Some picka, this marrying! All it needs is some surprise punch to put it over big! If only some fair damsel in distress and a thousand-dollar gown would rise up out of that black beast's lurid past and claim him as the father of her fourteen children! Or if Camilla should suddenly come to her senses and stab him to the heart—that would be something worth while! *Wow!* What a thumping murderer our dear old Camilla would make!"

The words weren't out of his mouth when Camilla's aunt caught me by my lace flounce, as we passed her, and beckoned me secretly aside. Her proud old face, all smiles a moment before, went haggard with anxiety the instant we were alone.

"It's over an hour since Camilla went upstairs to dress. Sturgis is black with fury at her keeping him waiting. Run upstairs, there's a dear child, and see if anything's wrong."

On my way through the hall, I came on Sturgis lounging on a couch at the foot of the stairs, languidly reading the newspaper and smoking a cigarette. There's a lot of the cat in me, I fear. I hugged myself with joy as I went up the stairs. The newspaper was upside down.

On the landing, outside Camilla's sitting-room door, stood Cooper, her English maid. Her face was all red with crying. She had a ring with two keys on it in her hand. She hailed me with a fervor very unlike her usual English reserve.

"Thank God, you've come, miss! I'm in sad trouble. I packed these keys by mistake in one of the trunks. John and I've only just got back from Grand Central. We'd an awful time getting them out!"

I looked at her in astonishment.

"What keys are they?"

"I couldn't say, miss, but my mistress was in an awful temper when she found out they'd gone. I never saw her so put out, and on her wedding day, too! Won't you take them in to her for me, miss? I'm afraid."

"Afraid!" I cried. "Don't be so ridiculous!" But I was afraid, too, as I snatched the keys from her and went in.

The sitting room was empty; nothing but cardboard boxes, tissue paper, and flowers. I ran to the bedroom door and knocked, but no one answered. I turned the handle softly and went in.

The beautiful room was in strange disorder. Everything was upside down. The bureau drawers open, the closets in chaos, the floor strewn with clothes. Overturned, on a chair, lay the wonderful traveling bag Sturgis had given Camilla that morning. Its gold bottles and brushes were strewn all over the bed.

In the corner knelt Camilla, still in her wedding gown and veil.

I ran over to her and caught her by the arm.

"In Heaven's name, what are you doing, Camilla?"

"I'm praying," she said.

"Praying!"

I looked at the altar before which she was kneeling. The point-lace cloth, the red candles glittering in their little gold candlesticks, the crystal vase with its blood-red flowers, the tiny brass brazier filled with incense, ascending upward in sweet-smelling, vaporous clouds! They made my blood run cold.

In the middle, on its bronze pedestal, stood the wax figure of Sturgis, his black eyes mocking us from under the tangle of his black lashes; his red lips smiling out at us from under the shadow of his pointed, black beard.

For what was Camilla praying? And to whom?

"Black Mass!" Instantly, that curious phrase in my cousin's letter flashed into my head.

Hardly knowing what I was doing, I seized the figure off its pedestal and flung it on the floor.

"Get up, Camilla! It's sacrilege! God won't answer such prayers!"

Camilla got up with a kind of scream.

"How dare you!" she cried. "How dare you!" Then she saw the keys in my hand. "You've got them!" she screamed. "You've got them! Then, God does answer such prayers!" She snatched the keys out of my hand and ran out of the room.

I flung myself between her and the sitting-room door.

"Camilla, where are you going?"

"That's my business."

"It's mine, too, if it's yours! Tell me!"

"To the studio, if you must know."

"The studio? You can't go to the studio now."

"Can't I? Why not?"

"You're late, as it is. What do you suppose people will say if they see you coming down not dressed?"

"It doesn't matter what they say. Besides, they're all too busy eating and drinking to worry about me. There's no one about."

"Sturgis is about. He's been waiting for you at the foot of the stairs for over an hour."

"Let him go on waiting then! I don't put foot outside this house till I've done what I want." She flung open the door. I wrenched it out of her hand and closed it again.

"What is it you want to do, Camilla?"

"I can't tell you," she said.

"Not tell me? You're not going to have secrets from me after all these years, are you?"

She began wringing her hands in a kind of anguish.

"I'm not having secrets from you."

"Then, why don't you tell me?"

"I can't, Goldie. You'd think it silly. You'd think it wicked. You wouldn't understand. Oh, what's the good of standing here talking! You're only making it worse. It's no good trying to stop me, Goldie. Tell you it's got to be done!"

"Then let me do it for you!" I cried. "Darling, listen to me. There's been too much talk about you and Sturgis, as it is. Don't give them any more to gossip about now! Let me do it for you, whatever it is you want done!"

"You?"

"Why not? It's not the first time I've done things for you, Camilla."

A kind of dreadful relief came into her face.

"Would you do it for me, Goldie? Would you?"

"You know I will."

"Whatever it is?"

"Whatever it is."

"On your word of honor?"

"On my oath if you like."

"Your word's as good as any one else's oath!" She caught my face between her two hands, looked deep into my eyes, then let me go suddenly as if satisfied. "All right. Do it!" She held up the keys. "The large one's the key of the studio door. The small one's the key of the bottom writing-table drawer. In it you'll find a white cardboard box tied round with a piece of red string. Lock the door. Light the fire. Burn the box."

"All right," I said.

"You'll stay there till every bit of it is burned? Promise?"

"I promise."

She gave me keys.

"Go down the back way, by the service stairs."

"Right." I took the keys and went out.

Outside stood the maid, leaning against the wall, crying. She caught me by the arm as I ran past.

"Is it all right, miss?"

"Of course it's all right," I snapped back. "Stop crying; Cooper, and go and get your mistress dressed."

Down the corridor I ran and through the green baize door which led to the servants' quarters. I picked up my finery and fled down the service stairs. Not a soul was about. Most of the servants were still in the reception room, serving. The rest were in the kitchens below having their share of the fun.

The studio was a built-out extension, shut off from the rest of the house. Camilla's people had sacrificed the whole of their beautiful back garden to

satisfy her artistic needs. For years, I had spent the best part of my life there. It was the room I loved best in the world.

All my life I've suffered from an unreasoning fear of being locked in a room by myself. "Klaustrophobia" the doctors call it, the terror of closed spaces. People laugh when I try to explain it. They can't understand what I mean. But, to those who suffer from it, it is the most hideous thing in the world.

It seized upon me as I stood there with the key in my hand. Little thrills of the well-known misery began running through and through me. It was as though some invisible presence stood beside me, preventing me from going in.

After a bit, I controlled myself. I unlocked the door and went in. I stood in the studio alone. The silence of the place was dreadful. It was as if some one lay dead in the room.

There were the books I had so often read. The chair in which I so often sat. The piano which I so often played. Sweet, refreshing hours of peace I had spent there, surrounded by beauty and love! Nothing there for me to be frightened at. Yet, I was paralyzed with fear.

I felt like a thief, as I knelt down and opened the drawer. Inside, lay the cardboard box. It was about six inches long. It was about two inches round. It was tied round the middle with a piece of red string. Innocent-looking enough in all conscience, yet I hated to touch it! I would have given anything I possessed not to have had to take it out of the drawer.

It was so much heavier than I had expected that I nearly dropped it. Heavens! How I hated that box! I found the matches. I lighted the logs. I shoved the box well down into the middle so that it couldn't fall out. - I sat down to watch it burn.

As it burned, I wondered what was inside it. Letters, of course. But, letters from whom? What secret lover had Camilla had that I did not know of; who could have written her such letters that she could not bring herself to destroy them before, and yet had not dared to go away and leave them behind?

I racked my brains as to who this man might be. I found no one but the man she had loved and married. Sturgis, of course.

I sat in my chair and I looked at the fire and I thought of Sturgis. His black eyes and his red lips rose up and mocked me out of the flames.

What kind of husband would he make, I wondered. What kind of life would they lead? "His black heart and her white body." What kind of "coupling" would theirs be?

The box took a long time to burn. At first the fire gave out very little heat. I suppose the logs were cold. Gradually, however, the box began to catch fire. I watched the flame eating its way across the cover, first the corner, then the flap, then the string. Like Camilla's love for Sturgis, I thought. First her body, then her brain, then her soul. Even so had her love for him devoured her life.

I sat in my chair and watched the burning. Suddenly, I saw a little red spot appear on the white outside. At first it was nothing but a pin prick, then slowly it spread wider and wider until the whole side of the box was red.

It looked to me like blood.

Suddenly, I was horribly frightened. The terror of closed rooms and locked doors came sweeping back on me. That awful sense of an unseen presence shook me from head to foot. I felt my heart melt within me, as if it were made of wax.

I wanted to scream. I wanted to run. Anything, anywhere, to get out of that dreadful room. In my panic, I

knocked over the andirons as I jumped up to go. The thing fell. It caught the logs. The box-slid over, turned a complete somersault. The thing inside it rolled out and fell on the hearth at my feet.

I saw what it was.

It was a little wax figure about six inches in length, about two inches round. It wore a peaked cap and ballooning Dutch trousers. It had a little clay pipe, upside down, in the corner of its mouth. It had skates on its high red shoes.

It was Jane.

In the middle of her leg was stuck a pin with a ruby head. In the middle of her breast was a little pin with a diamond star. A black opal pin, pear shaped and set with brilliants, was stuck through her heart.

I stood in the silence and I looked at Jane and Jane looked back at me. It was as though she had risen from the dead. The blood thrummed in my ears. The heart drummed in my breast. My head went round and round.

Camilla! Camilla! What was this thing she had done! Was it only a silly superstition or had she committed a crime? I remembered my cousin's words when he told us the story of the Wax Duchess.

"Who shall deny the force of thought? Who shall limit the power of prayer?"

Had her thought, flung forth with hate, had the power to destroy the life forces of Jane? Was there a god of evil and hate, omnipotent and omniscient as the God of goodness and love who heard and answered prayers?

Evil or good; God or devil; my word remained my word.

I did what had to be done. I took up the brass tongs that had fallen. I picked up the little figure. I thrust Jane back into the fire.

Her black-glass eyes looked at me mournfully out of the logs. I remem-

bered my dream when I saw Camilla writhing in the flames of hell.

The wax melted and melted. It took on all kinds of fantastic shapes. It ran all over the logs. The fire leaped up and licked it as though it loved it! I felt as if a murder had been committed before my eyes.

At last it was over. Nothing remained to show what had been done. My own anguish had been burned up, too, in that great burning. I thought, as long as I lived, I should never suffer from the terror of closed spaces again.

I locked the drawer. I hung up the tongs. I put out the logs. As the gas went out, something sharp fell out on the tiles with a little ping! It was the black opal pin Sturgis had taken out of his tie. I picked it up in my handkerchief and took it with me. I did not dare to leave it behind.

Slowly, as if all the youth had gone out of me, I went back the way I had come.

On the landing, outside the door, stood Camilla, ready dressed to go down.

"Is it done?" she asked.

"It's done," I said.

She caught me to her and kissed me close and long.

"My Goldie!" she whispered. "My Goldie!"

I kissed her back with the same love as ever. After all, what right had I to judge her? If I had been equally tempted, I might have done the same.

For a moment, we clung together in a kind of despair. It came to me that love can be born out of evil as well as out of good! I wondered if it might not be possible that God had compassion even for the devil; the devil, an agony of longing, that he might, one day, be good like God! My soul seemed born anew as it dawned upon me that that might be the answer to all our questioning. That that might be the ultim-

mate end of all sorrow and evil and pain.

Well, those were my thoughts as we clung together. Then Camilla pushed me toward the stairs.

"You go on down first, love, and tell them I'm coming."

I went down.

In the drawing-room, they were still dancing. In the dining room, I could hear the sound of voices and laughter and the popping' of corks, as the servants opened the champagne.

In the hall stood the old butler, very sad and solemn in his new dress suit with a white satin favor pinned in his coat. His wrinkled old face lighted up when he saw me.

"The fam'ly's in the liberty, miss, waiting for Mrs. Sturgis to come down."

It is servants who are the real "sensitives." In some mysterious way of their own, they know the instant anything is wrong, without being told a word. He opened the door for me and I went in.

Camilla's aunt and uncle were sitting bolt upright in their chairs making polite conversation, belied by their haggard faces and anguished eyes. My cousin had picked up a book. Sturgis, languidly smoking his eternal cigarette, was lounging on the Chesterfield, teasing Camilla's aunt's pet dog. The detectives watching the presents had obliterated themselves behind the screens.

Round the room and on the tables lay the presents—diamonds Camilla would never wear; silver plate Camilla would never use; jewels; crystals; china; books—a million dollars' worth of beauty. Camilla would have given them all for one kiss from her husband's lips.

At sight of me they all jumped up except Sturgis who didn't stir.

"Where is Camilla?" they cried.

"She'll be down in a minute." I went over and stood by Sturgis. "It's my

fault she's late. I'm sorry. I had a stupid attack of nerves."

Sturgis looked at me with his mocking eyes.

"Too much love-making, sweetheart, or too much champagne?"

"Too much unhappiness, Sturgis. You're taking away the thing I love best in the world."

That pleased him. It was his misfortune to find his pleasure in other people's pain.

"Are there no men left in New York?" he drawled and he looked at my cousin.

How I hated that man!

He flicked his cigarette out of its black onyx holder, set with tiny diamonds, on to the floor and lighted a fresh one. The flame of the match caught the ring on his hand, his talisman! Poor woman done to death in that far-away land! Happier than Camilla and Jane, I thought! Her husband had shot her dead as she lay sleeping in Sturgis' arms!

The door opened and Camilla came in.

She was exquisite in a gray lace gown and a marvelous chinchilla and chiffon wrap. Her beautiful face framed in its gray ostrich plumes was serene and calm. Her delicate cheeks were flushed soft rose. Her shadowy eyes under her silver veil shone out as bright and as hard as nails. The great ruby Sturgis had given her for his wedding gift burned like fire on the whiteness of her breast.

A hard woman, this new Camilla of mine, perhaps even a wicked woman, but a woman to live and die for.

In her hand she held a white cardboard box tied round with red string.

"For you," she said and she smiled at Sturgis.

"What is it?" he asked.

Camilla opened the box. Inside lay the Wax Duchess in her scarlet velvet gown.

"Your wedding gift," said Camilla and she offered it to Sturgis. "You've got what you wanted, you see."

"I always get what I want!" he said and his black eyes flamed at her.

"So do I," said Camilla and she laughed that sweet laugh of hers, silver-clear like running water, the most delicious laughter I ever heard.

She put the figure down on its little bronze pedestal, and Sturgis looked at it through his smoke.

"Where's the pin I gave her?" he drawled.

I thrust myself between them and showed him the pin in my hand.

"Here. It fell out and I picked it up," I said.

Camilla took it. I saw that the point was stained bright red. Sturgis saw it, too. He never seemed to look at anything, but there was nothing he didn't see.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Wax!" said Camilla and her eyes shone out from under her silver veil, as bright and as hard as nails. To me, it was Jane's blood.

Camilla took the handkerchief out of my hand and wiped the pin clean. With one of her graceful movements, swift and unexpected as the flight of a bird, she leaned over to Sturgis and took the black pearl he was wearing and put in the black opal instead.

"Jane gave you this pin, didn't she? Poor Jane! She was so fond of you. I'd like you to wear it in memory of her to-day!"

You could almost hear the shiver of excitement that went through us as we stood there holding our breath as to what was coming next.

Sturgis didn't turn a hair. He lifted her hands, palm upward, foreign fashion, kissed them lightly, and let them go.

"You are as generous as you are enchanting," he said. He stooped to a mirror framed in little, silver, laughing

cupids, one of their wedding gifts which stood on a table beside him and calmly settled his tie.

I caught my cousin's eyes dancing with unholy glee. Here was his surprise "punch" with a vengeance. If ever human countenance registered human emotion, his eyes said "*Wow!*"

Sturgis slipped back his sleeve and looked at his watch.

"Five past three," he drawled. "Ready?"

His voice was as quiet as a lake at twilight, but I heard the storm that lay behind the calm. To me it was as if he had shouted as he had shouted that day in the Park.

As in a vision there rose up before me the blinding snow, the sullen ice; Jane's red skirts flying; and Sturgis crying aloud to heaven as he whirled her slim body round and round his head.

The cry of the conqueror returning from victory. The cry of the beast who had made his kill. The cry of primeval man to primitive woman! The cry of mate to mate!

The savage set free in me that day rose up in me again and set my blood on fire. I envied Camilla. No matter what sin she had committed, no matter what the price she might be called upon to pay, at least this hour of divine madness would have been hers.

Sturgis offered her his arm and she took it. Thus linked together—no longer a pair, but one—they passed out of the room. The others streamed out into the hall after them. The detectives slipped from behind their screens to steal a look at the great going away. Even Peggie, the fat old pug, jumped down from her cushions and waddled out of the door to see what was going on.

The Wax Duchess and I were alone. She stood on her pedestal surrounded by diamonds and pearls, jewels and

lace, great treasures of silver and gold—the things that from time immemorial women have loved and given their souls to possess.

She had had those things, too, that strange woman, with her inhuman beauty—a great castle to live in, a bed of ebony and coral with pillows of velvet and sheets of fur to sleep in; sweet green pleasures, gay with flowers and jeweled with lakes, had been hers to walk in. She had henchmen to guard her, footmen to run for her, tiring women to rub her fair body with soft unguents and comb her raven hair.

On her breast had burned the great ruby torn from the neck of an empress, spoil of her great kinsman returned from the war. On her hand she wore the mystic emerald, the gift of a pope, that foretold the approach of danger by turning black. On her shoulder sat a shivering ape—her "familiar," her judges called it when she was tried—its unruly paws bound together with golden chains. Behind her, walked a Moorish dwarf, with red feathers in his green turban, to uphold her train.

When she fared forth, she was borne through the cheering streets in a litter of ivory with hangings of scarlet. When she fasted, two nuns knelt beside her making cups of their fingers to prevent the hot wax from running down from the tapers she held and marring the beauty of her soft white hand. When she feasted, she sat at the right hand of kings and ate off platters of gold.

All these things had she been given and they had not sufficed her. She had wanted other things; the love of a man who did not love her; the death of the woman who had stolen his love away.

Those things, too, she had wanted and she had got them. She had plunged her hands into hell to snatch the desire of her soul from the flames. What had she got out of the great burning to repay her for what they had cost?

Dead five hundred years and her evil thought still had the power to work evil! Did her soul in torment look on at this impulse to sin which she had let loose on the world and was powerless to recall? What more frightful punishment could the ingenuity of the devil or the justice of Heaven devise?

I looked at the Wax Duchess and I saw that all the wickedness had gone out of her face and only the sadness remained. An anguish of pity for this soul who had sinned and suffered and perished five hundred years before I was born rose up in my heart.

"Were you, too, once happy and good? Did you, too, once love the birds and the flowers and the laughter of little children, and the beauty of God in the stars in the sky and the moon upon the sea? Did some strange passion not of your seeking seize upon the temple of your flesh as its sanctuary and make you its own?"

Suddenly, to me it was no longer a little wax statue which stood there before me. It was the soul I loved, Camilla's soul, typified in wax.

I bent down and I kissed her. At the touch of her cold wax lips I burst into tears.

"Now then, now then!" said a gay voice behind me. "Crying! What's the meaning of this?"

I turned to find Philip standing at the door looking in. He was so sane, so healthy, so full of the goodness and joy of life, it was as if the windows had suddenly been thrown open and a breath of pure wind, fresh from the sea and sweet with the tang of the salt, had blown in.

I ran to him like a child seeking shelter from something it does not understand but fears. For a moment I surrendered myself to the joy of his dear, strong arms.

"Why, what's the matter, my sweet?" he said tenderly, laying his hand on my head.

"I'm frightened, Philip; frightened."
"Frightened of what?" he said.

"Of life; of death. Of the passions that tear us to pieces. Of the possibility of evil that lies in us all. You said the bad in us can destroy the good in another by mere projection of our will. Can it, Philip? Can it? Has hate the same power as love? Has thought the power to kill? Tell me. Tell me!"

Philip smiled.

"I'll tell you something better than that, kid. The power for evil in us is not so strong as the power for good. The power of thought to destroy is not so strong as the power of thought to create. The power of the devil is not so strong as the power of God. It's a big fight we have to put up, kid, but it's a glorious one! Every decent thing we do, every temptation we overcome, every noble impulse that we obey, every good thought we send out, helps the good work along. It's a far cry from the jellyfish to Edison. It's a long way

from the gutter up to the stars, but we're getting there, kid; we're getting there! Every day sees us a bit nearer on the way to the ultimate end of it all—perfection, which is only another name for God!"

He took my face between his two hands, looking deep into my eyes.

"Guess we'll try to be good, honey; how about it? Fix your soul on Camilla's happiness and she'll be happy in some way incomprehensible to you with that black beast of hers! Forget that poor wax dolly's weakness and sin and fix your thought on her beauty and strength. Who knows? You may be helping her out of her own particular hell which she made for herself. How about it, kid? Am I right?"

"You're always right, Phil," I whispered.

"Then stop crying!" he said promptly. "Are there no men left in New York City for you to cry about?" he drawled.

It seemed to me the Wax Duchess smiled as he kissed away my tears.

HESITATION

WILL you laugh at me to-day,
If I come to you and say,
"I can touch you with a magic
That will steal your hate away?"

Can I hope that you will see
Friendship in your enemy?
Even if you do, I warrant,
You will mock the more at me.

I should so much like to try.
But, indeed, I'd rather die
Than be put to such confusion.
I had better pass you by!

ROBERT HILLYER.



The Noose

By Charles Hanson Towne

Author of "The Old Crowd,"
"The Feathered Nest," etc.

THEY talk of the hangman's noose. There is another that is almost as cruel, that twists the heart and soul instead of the throat.

I knew Martin Falder before, and after, the cord was tightened about him, and I saw the curious spiritual metamorphosis of a man who had been, and always will be, lovable and kind. Even when the knot was adjusted, he retained that spiritual grace which was so definitely a part of him, and though he cried out once or twice to me, his oldest and closest friend, the world did not guess half that he experienced. A few misjudged him. They did so through sheer ignorance.

He loved Marian Stacy. I knew he did. I saw them on their first meeting—a beautiful May day, along the Palisades, where four of us had gone for an afternoon picnic in the woods. I never dreamed that when I asked Marian to come with us, she and Martin would look into each other's eyes and be lost. I had not thought her the type of girl a man like Martin Falder would love. But there they stood, on a rock, with all New York, like a monstrous back drop behind them—you remember "Louise?"—and life was never the same for them again.

Martin should have been a writer. He dabbled away, but never finished

anything; he was too busy helping others to care how his own work got along. He wasted his time gloriously. He was really one of those splendid failures, one of those magnificent wrecks which are cast up all too frequently on the shores of vast cities. To-morrow would do as well as to-day; what was the use of worrying?

But when he met Marian he changed completely. I lost track of him for a month or two, and I heard vaguely that he was writing—and writing hard. I said to myself, "This is his redemption." We all thought so. To think of Martin disappearing, burying himself so that he could produce something worth while! It was wonderful. He was getting on toward thirty, and it was high time that he showed what was in him. He was at that period of a man's life when he must prove his mettle.

He had always been loved by every one. And he was so good-looking that women held their breath when he came into a room. He looked almost ten years younger than he was; he had a sort of blond perfection that caused people to stare at him on the Avenue; a type that could drink a lot and never show it, rising fresh as a peony from an evening of shameful debauchery, the despair of others in his set. He

hadn't a line in his face, and his gray eyes looked out on the world wistfully and wonderingly. I never knew any one who enjoyed life more.

But his happiness with Marian Stacy was fugitive. There was a disagreeable rumor that she became engaged to him, imagining that he was rich; that when her father discovered that his daughter had attached herself to a more or less impecunious writer fellow, his wrath knew no bounds, and he—not Marian—summarily dismissed him. Whatever the truth, one fact remained: Martin Falder did not marry Marian Stacy.

He drank a lot after a society journal printed a wretched story of him and his unfortunate love affair. He had threatened to horsewhip the editor, which gave the matter more unsavory publicity. Then he left the city. When he came back, he was married—to some one else.

Genevieve Urquhart was her name. She was a widow, and she was almost twenty years Martin's senior. Her beauty was passing. It was tragic to see them together. I shall never forget my first meeting with them—his boyish, open countenance; her drooping mouth and double chin, fine black eyes, surrounded with tiny wrinkles, and hair obviously touched with peroxide. She dressed magnificently. Who couldn't on three hundred thousand a year? But her figure was no longer girlish, and all the art of fashionable modistes could not conceal the fact that she was a matron. Once upon a time she must have been stunning, but now, before crossing that last ditch which definitely separates youth from age, she was bringing all her strength to bear, holding the bridle firmly, yet galloping toward the inevitable line.

How had this marriage happened? We could only guess. Again there were breathless rumors. Tongues that had practiced so assiduously before,

now wagged with greater fervor. The rehearsals they had gone through caused them to move more nimbly, and agile words fell from a chorus of lips.

He had been trapped, caught by a woman of the world when he had been in the depths of despair. Any woman could have accomplished the trick. Cajolingly the bit had been put into his mouth, and honeyed words, like loaves of sugar, had sweetly won him. Why hadn't some one else had the wit to snatch this boy in life's most devastating hour?

Well, the world said, if he had been foolish enough to marry out of pique, he deserved all he got. This was no love match, obviously. It was an arrangement, a business deal, a bid for a taste of phantom felicity—anything but a marriage between two people who deeply loved each other.

But even Martin's enemies—he had a few, as we all have—could not bring themselves to assert that he had married for money; that he craved a slipp'd ease. He had too much imagination, too much manhood to do anything so stupidly false. Yet somewhere in all of us who knew him well the thought persisted that, in a moment of utter disillusion, he might have sunk that low, not counting the cost.

I wish I could have gone to him in those first months after he brought Genevieve back—not to his home, but to hers—and seen for myself what people told me of. But I was called abroad on business, and it was a long time before I returned to New York. During my absence Martin changed not at all in appearance; he was the perennially youthful Martin, whose only religion was Peter Pantheism, as some one wittily said of him. But she, his wife—it was ghastly. There had always been a look of hardness about her mouth, but now the eyes were haunted and hungry, two burnt-out coals sunk back in her head. The lus-

ter was leaving her skin, despite the energetic labor of a fabulously paid masseuse, and in desperation she changed modistes and diéted perpetually, with all the ardor of a nun.

I had to go to dinner several times with them. Martin seemed to want me. I sensed his loneliness, and I could not fail him. Why should I? We had gone to school and college together. I always believed that some day he would write a great novel; he had culture and breeding and no little wit. A smart comedy might have been his *métier*, but as the years passed, I lost hope for him. Now, when I saw him in this home to which Genevieve had taken him, my last dream of his definite literary arrival was crushed.

For Martin himself was crushed. Yes, it was all too apparent. His wife was vulgar. There was a curiously old-fashioned look about her, although, as I have said, she spent a small fortune on clothes every year. Her abundant hair was piled high on her rather large head, and came down on her forehead in a sort of bang. I can't, being a mere man, describe how it was dressed, but the painted mouth beneath it, and her flashing, black eyes and hourglass figure—well, some one said of her that she looked as if she might be the *villainess* in a George Ade fable, and that her name ought to have been Alice Moore. You have seen pictures of adventuresses in mining camps—that was the way Genevieve looked, and the longer I gazed into her face the less I could understand Martin's marriage. For it was only too plain that she had not come from that stratum of society where he had always belonged. I shuddered at what his silver-haired, ivory-skinned mother would have thought, had she been living, of this daughter-in-law.

And Genevieve's voice! It was rau-
cous, terrible; and she was utterly unconscious of her commonness.

"Why, how *are* you?" was her greeting to me. "One of Mart's oldest friends, I'm told!"

I shall never be able to get upon paper the accent she put upon "Mart" and how it grated not only upon me, but upon him. He winced, visibly. That "r"—it ground into my heart, and I hardly remember getting into the dining room. But before we gathered there—six of us had gone together—cocktails in glasses that were too large and too ornate were served in the drawing-room that was likewise too ornate.

At the overdecorated table there were little cards at each guest's place, and when I picked mine up, I saw that a crude, little drawing had been made in one corner, in pen and ink. It was supposed to be a caricature of me, and perhaps had been drawn from a snapshot. Beneath it was this couplet:

Here sits dear Martin's oldest friend;
We hope his life will never end.

The other cards, amid loud mirth from our hostess, were read by the guests. All were equally crude and fatuous. It was poor Genevieve's idea of humor. She had written them herself, and drawn the portraits that afternoon, and had them as a surprise for us all. You should have seen Martin's expression when he realized what a fool his wife had made of herself. I recall the couplet that he was forced to read aloud:

Now here's the spot where the dinner's startin':
It's here I've seated my darling Martin.

We were glad when the sherry was poured, for the big cocktail hadn't had time to take effect, and I noticed that Martin began at once to sip more of everything than he should. It must have been an awful evening for him. I suffered vicariously. To think that he had done this thing!

It was right after the fish that Genevieve rose, and startled us all by lifting her glass of sherry and saying:

"Well, folks, I'm glad you're here in my house, and I hope you'll come often. The latchstring's always down for you all."

She wasn't in the least embarrassed. It was we who figuratively, if not literally, hung our heads. I remember glancing over at Elsie Talbot and Tom, her husband. If Elsie had happened to catch my eye at that instant, I think we both should have exploded, disgraced ourselves. Fortunately, she was looking at poor Martin, who seemed unable to do anything.

When the claret came on, Genevieve said, looking around the gaudy centerpiece of sweet peas and lilies of the valley:

"Now, Mart, you get up and propose a toast—do! It's *your* turn!"

He couldn't at first, but it was obvious to me that he didn't wish to wound this pitiful creature who graced the table. She smiled when he finally managed to rise.

"My dear friends," was all he got out, "it's wonderful to have you here. Won't you come again?" And he sat down like a frightened schoolboy.

I shall never forget the pathos of that last phrase, with its plea for another meeting. What must it be like here when they were alone was the thought that went through all our minds, I am sure.

I never can recall what was said, exactly, at that death's feast. Two butlers in lavish liveries brought rare food on delicate plates, and I, on Genevieve's right, was struggling to say polite and pleasant things, but her eyes shifted constantly to Martin, "my darling Mart," as she repeatedly referred to him, and she seemed to have no other interest, no other thought, save him. So I must have shifted all my conversation so that it embraced Martin, an easy thing to do, fond as I was of the poor boy. He smiled wanly, and Blue kept him going, and every now

7—Ains.

and then a laugh would burst from his lips; it sounded like old days to me. You see, he couldn't repress for long that golden gift of laughter, and as the butler poured more and more wine into his glass, he bubbled up, and was himself, like the champagne when at last that imprisoned joy was released.

Genevieve used the sparkling stuff as another excuse to rise and propose a toast.

"Say, how do you like my wines, liquors, and *seegars*?" she asked, and burst into a loud guffaw. "Pretty nifty, eh? Oh, yes, there'll be *seegars*!"

When she sat down, I couldn't look at her—at anybody. It seemed to me that the whole earth rocked beneath my feet, that in a tumult everything was over and done.

"*My* wines, liquors, and *seegars*!" The vulgarian had said it that way—she could say it in no other—and I saw Martin crashing down the years, with this bediamonded woman forever near him, forever calling out her rude, crude speeches.

Vaguely in my memory I can see silver liqueur cups later that evening. And there is a dim impression of *seegars* in golden tinfoil; in my dreams now they are always a mile long, and I never finish smoking one. I am forever, in this nightmare which still haunts me, unable to leave that garish house on the Avenue, and my taxi at the door grinds out a frightful amount while I am captive there. A raucous voice in my ear—just a little tipsy, it sounds—tells me not to worry, kiddo, for she will pay for it with *her* money.

The vulgar are often overgenerous. But if they are generous with their temporal belongings, they are sometimes penurious when it comes to such spiritual gifts as freedom.

Genevieve loved poor, youthful Martin. I have no doubt that in her un-

developed way she cared for him very deeply, and she lavished presents upon him, proudly bore him here and there in a long, gray car, and snapped her jeweled fingers at the rest of the world. She was wise enough to sense the fact that none of his friends liked her. God knows we tried valiantly to hide our real emotions, but with the devilish clairvoyance of the uncouth she perceived our secret feelings, our innermost judgments, and was unmoved by them. She had what she wanted, "her Mart," and that was enough. The rest of us could go hang.

But it was the beloved Martin who was hanging, day by day, on the noose she had placed so deftly and definitely about his neck. Choked by it, he could not breathe easily; hampered by its clutches, he almost died, spiritually; yet what could he do? She would never let him divorce her, and, of course, she would not divorce him.

When, on another bitter occasion, I met them at a reception, and a stranger spoke to Genevieve of "her son" my heart went out to her, for I saw the look of pain which swept across her tired face. She got that kind of remark more than once, and it took months of travel sometimes to erase the memory of it. It was the price she paid for her purchase of such happiness as came to her.

In desperation Martin came to me once—to tell me of an event which must have occurred in this tangled world many times, when a marriage like his has taken place. He needed money, and he had none of his own. The trifles he had saved, and earned, had gone into gifts for Genevieve, and the inevitable hour had come when he must have funds of his own. He wrote an essay—how, he never knew, for his wife was everlastingly at his heels. It came back, not only once, but twice, thrice. Then he tore it up. The life must have gone out of his

style. He couldn't bear the strain much longer. What was he to do? But she had seen, had known, of his struggle with his pen. She sent him a check by her maid—on a silver card plate!

"But what am I to do?" he begged me to tell him.

I could not answer. Having taken the initial step, having married a woman of wealth without loving her, would it be so difficult, I could not help wondering, to take the other insincere steps that must inevitably follow? But the very fact that Martin had come to me and told me this would have proved to me—had I ever had any doubts whatever—that he had not married Genevieve for her money. This was the moment for other revelations, for other backings-up of my belief in him, my substantial faith in the man who had always been my friend.

"You shall have any amount from me," I began, but he waved his hand.

"No, Gerald, that could never be. You know I have not told you this because I wanted you to say just that. We have known each other too long. I could no more take anything from you than from Genevieve." And he buried his face in his hands.

I noted how the gold hair grew in a crisp, thick riot of curls on his shapely head; how his lithe body had lost none of its strength and beauty of outline—in short, how young he still appeared. I waited for him to look up. He did, in a moment. I could ask him now. I never knew I could bring myself to it, but I did.

"How did it happen?" I inquired. "You can tell anything to me, Martin. Surely you know that."

There was, instead of the look of anger I might have expected, and deserved, a look of tenderness and relief in that boyish countenance. For there comes a time in every man's affairs when he must unload his burden on

some one else's back, shift the weight to fresh shoulders, or gradually get upon his knees unable to complete the journey.

"You will hate me," he said simply. "But I am going to tell you. I know what the others are saying; I can guess, if I do not actually hear. Well, they are wrong; the world is usually wrong. You know me so well, Gerald, and you therefore know that never, never, could I have married for money!"

He paused, and glanced out of the window of my rooms where the park, in its green beauty, seemed to shelter the whole city. Each tree was a great, uplifted hand blessing the tired town, and Martin perhaps had the same thought I had when he looked out upon this beauty which never wearies us. I knew that he wanted confirmation from me, so I said:

"Of course you are right, Martin. I understand. Go on."

"I—I—" He paused, and one hand stroked his forehead, as fine as that of Praxiteles. "Well, I might as well say it and be done with it, Gerald. I was half drunk when I proposed to Genevieve. Now what do you think of me?" He looked me straight in the eye, and I could see his white teeth clench, as though he were glad he had told me.

All I said was:

"I now understand many things that were riddles to me before. I'm glad you took me into your confidence, old man."

He looked surprised and relieved.

"You really mean that, Gerald? You don't despise me for the worm I am?" The eagerness on his face was pathetic.

"Despise you? Not at all. You were wounded by what had happened. You drank in desperation. You were never yourself for one hour after Marian broke her engagement with

you. We all knew that. The only pity is that you could not have been kept under lock and key"—I tried to smile—"so that no one could get at you."

"Oh, how disloyal I am, to sit here discussing, even with you, this foolish action of mine! I'm sober now, God knows, too sober! I've drunk a lot so that I'd look older. I just can't. What's the matter with me, anyway? Am I a moron? And Gen— Oh, forgive me, Gerald! I'm glad I didn't quite say it."

I knew what he meant: that Genevieve looked older every day. How was he, seemingly forever young, to catch up with her? It was ironic, hideous, grotesque—the boy who would be an old man; the old woman who would be a young girl! And for both of them to know it, yet never say it! What a life together!

It came out at last, the whole piteous story: how he thought he loved this woman, in a mad hour; how she protected him, put her hand on his head, as the trees out there placed their green fingers with healing touch over the weary paths. It was easy to see how he had capitulated. He was unstrung, out of his head, if you wish to put it that way; and Genevieve was a woman, after all, who had had everything she wanted all her life, and was not to lose this last gift of the gods. She had slipped a silken noose about his heart. She had filled his life in that moment. The rest was simple. Was he weak, and tired, a seeker after any haven? He only knew that he clumsily asked her to be his. She must have smiled when her hands wandered through those crisp, boyish curls.

"But some day," I heard his voice saying, "I know all will come right. If only Marian will wait for me, I can induce her to—"

"Don't speak of that," I warned him. "That would never do. That can never

be... If you got your freedom to-morrow, you could never win that girl. Haven't you seen this afternoon's newspaper?"

His head went back with a curious gesture that I remembered from our boyhood.

"What do you mean, Gerald?"

"I mean that Marian Stacy is married to Randall Thomas."

His cheeks grew suddenly ashen. All the light went out of his eyes. You will not believe what I am going to tell you, but it is the truth: Martin Falder in that instant added twenty years to his age.

For Randall Thomas was the richest man we knew, and in the twinkling of an eye the hideous realization came to Martin that Marian had become his wife because of his money. She, too, was desperate, then! In his suffering for her, his body, as well as his soul, seemed to shrivel up before me.

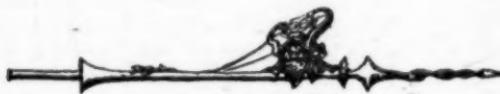
A boy had come to my rooms. A tired, old man went out.

Genevieve was away—that is how it had happened that he could see me. Weeks later she returned, radiantly young.

They do the thing well nowadays. Every line was lifted from her face. Her eyes glowed with new fire. Another miracle! But we have grown used to them.

The young-old husband met the old-young wife. Her happiness, they say, was pathetic. But I wonder what it all meant and how, out of so much mental and bodily pain, stupid mortals can think they attain any lasting joy? Through artificial suffering the woman achieved a fleeting hour of youth; through a real grief the man found enduring old age.

And as she was stronger to tighten the noose around his heart, he was weaker to resist.



VENUS VICTRIX

MAD sunsets, dappled skies, dark heaven's fill
Of palpitating worlds; all these we would
Bow down to—aye, and worship if we could;
But Nature's they, while God's is Woman still.
Astarte or St. Agnes: when you will,
Yours is the might that wrecks the world in blood;
Oh, Woman, if you knew your power for good,
How grandly would you spurn your power for ill!
Eternal strength your plaything from your birth,
All life is yours whose smile or tear confutes
The sage's wisdom, breaks the rulers' rods;
In your hands lie the destinies of earth,
Who finds us men and lowers us to brutes,
Or finds us brutes and raises us to gods!

REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN.



More Super-Women

By Anice Terhune

Belle Boyd:

The Civil War Circe.

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
Except with this for an overword—
But where are the snows of yesteryear?
—*Ballad of Dead Ladies.*

ONE day, early in the first summer of the Civil War, a woman sat sewing on the veranda of her home in Martinsburg, Virginia. A Federal soldier, so drunk that he did not know what he was about, came reeling down the street. The white gown of the woman attracted his roving, bleary eye. He lurched off the beaten path, and up the veranda steps.

Leering drunkenly, he swayed toward the woman's chair, uttering an unspeakably vile insult as he did so. The woman, pale with anger, rose from her chair, her sewing falling in a billowy mass at her feet. As she got up, the soldier reeled forward again and struck her such a blow that she tumbled to the floor in an inert heap.

It was the last blow the man ever struck. As his victim fell, there was a flash and the report of a pistol. The soldier wheeled round and fell face downward without a moan. He was shot straight through the heart.

Framed in the doorway stood a young girl, the seventeen-year-old daughter of the house. One rigid hand held a smoking revolver; the other grasped the side of the door for support. The girl's eyes gazed in horri-

fied fascination at the man whom she had just shot to death.

Such was Belle Boyd's entrance into the Civil War and into our story. Passing through the hall, she had heard the Federal soldier's insult to her mother; she had seen her mother felled by a blow from the drink-directed hand. Then and there was born in the girl a bitter, implacable hatred for all Northerners and for the cause they represented.

Though her father was one of the first men who volunteered to fire on Fort Sumter in 1861, and was later one of the famous "Stonewall Jackson Brigade," Belle had been more or less undecided as to which cause she favored in the great struggle. From the moment that she killed her mother's assailant, she threw herself heart and soul into the Confederate service.

At the outbreak of the war, she had just graduated from Mount Washington Female College. She was acknowledged as the beauty of Martinsburg. She was idolized by all the youths of the town, from the hobbledehoys up.

Although just out of the schoolroom, Belle had already been through the throes of several youthful love affairs. She was such an incorrigible coquette that her father declared she "would flirt with the mummified body of King Ptolemy."

On the day that Belle made her mo-

mentous entry into the war—the Fourth of July, as it happened—the Northerners were in possession of Martinsburg.

"That hated Union flag floated from all the windows," writes the fierce little Confederate, in her memoirs.

Her first plan of campaign was this: to throw herself in the way of the young Federal officers; to use all her wiles upon their unsuspecting and susceptible hearts, shamelessly staking her beauty and her wondrous super-woman magnetism for their utter undoing.

The Boyd home was within the Federal lines. It was the easiest thing in the world for this Civil War Circe to draw her victims to her home. Once there she so bewitched them that she was enabled to steal their pistols and their side arms from under their very noses, as they paid court to her or knelt to swear their undying love. These valued weapons she smuggled through, as trophies, to the Confederates. She did more than this. She wheedled many a military secret out of her adorers. The secrets she passed on to General Stuart.

Things went swimmingly for the youthful spy, until one time, when she chanced to send an important message to the general by an old negro mammy. The negress and the letter fell into Federal hands. The plot was traced to Belle, and she was arrested by Captain Gwynne. The girl turned the battery of her charms on the captain, with the result that in less than half an hour the man was head over heels in love with her. Instead of shooting her as a spy, the commanding officer took one look at his beautiful prisoner and merely read her the articles of war, and let her go, warning her that she would not get off so easily if she were caught in the same game again.

From that moment, Belle was a per-

petual suspect. The article of war that concerned her, read thus:

Whoever shall give food, ammunition, or information, or aid and abet the enemies of the United States government, in any manner whatever, shall suffer death.

Belle, hearing this read aloud, felt no fear at all. She knew, from experience, that her beauty and brain and magnetism would get her out of any scrape, even though she might seem to be at the point of death.

So she kept right on as she had begun, gathering Federal secrets and throwing them over the fence into the Confederate camp, stealing hearts and weapons wherever and whenever she could make use of them, nursing many adoring and wounded Confederate soldiers, mingling in the thick of the scrimmage, first in one way and then another.

She never lost an opportunity to make use of circumstances. For instance, once when she was riding between two Confederate officers, her horse ran away. Rearing and plunging, he seized the bit between his teeth, then lowered his head and made for the Federal lines. So straight was his course that one might almost suspect his clever mistress had had something to do with his choice of direction. At any rate, the horse took her at a mad gallop right into the Federal camp.

Belle screamed for help as she passed the picket. She also gazed at the man out of agonized and very beautiful eyes. Instantly he rushed to her aid. So did several other officers. Among them they brought the heaving horse to a shaky standstill. Having subdued the brute for the moment, they feared to trust Belle alone with him, lest he start to run again. Two officers gallantly declared that they would escort her home.

The girl, still shaken, apparently, by her wild ride, thanked them prettily and accepted their offered help. Chat-

ting pleasantly, the three rode out of camp. Once beyond the Blue lines, the tables quickly turned. Belle's Confederate friends, who had been waiting more or less patiently for her, fell upon her would-be rescuers and made them prisoners! Belle certainly was clever!

The poor Federal officers were speechless for a moment, at the low-down trick that had been played on them in return for their chivalry. Then one of them found his voice:

"Who, in Heaven's name, is this—lady?" he exploded.

"Belle Boyd, at your service!" answered the girl with a malicious smile of triumph.

"Good God, the rebel spy!" he cried.

Success attended the treacherous beauty wherever she went. No matter how small a hole she found herself in, she always managed to wriggle out.

She was visiting her aunt and uncle at Front Royal, when Federal troops advanced on the town. There was a battle in which the Northerners won. Belle tried, too late, to escape. She was recognized as "a dangerous and unscrupulous adventuress," and was carried to General Shields.

The general was a susceptible Irishman. He proved an easy prey for the skillful super-woman. She soon wheedled him into freeing her, and into giving her passes through the lines.

Belle hurried on toward Richmond, but at Winchester she was again arrested and denounced as a spy. Shields' passes proved worthless. Under a strong guard, she was taken to Baltimore. Things began to look alarming for the girl. So, again, she tried her blandishments on the officers set to guard her. As a result, she got herself gently transferred back to her aunt's home, which was now General Shields' headquarters. The general welcomed her with joy and gave her the run of the house.

Presently, a secret military confer-

ence was called in the drawing-room. Plans were discussed for annihilating General Jackson.

Belle, suspecting something of great importance was afoot, tiptoed lightly to a bedroom on the second floor, directly over the drawing-room. She slipped down to the bedroom floor, and lay prone, with her ear at a small knot-hole in the flooring. There she stayed, motionless, until she had overheard every word uttered by the plotters. Then she wrote the scheme all out in Confederate cipher. Next she cleverly forged passports for herself, and started for the Confederate lines.

She was challenged three times by sentries, but she finally got through to Winchester, with the aid of a young Federal lieutenant who could not resist her weird fascination. His name is not mentioned in her memoirs. He is merely called "Lieutenant H."

She delivered her cipher to her father's commander, Colonel Ashby, in safety. Just as she was ready to start back to Front Royal, a man brought her two packages of letters, and asked her to send them through the Federal lines.

Belle eagerly accepted the commission, first concealing some valuable documents about her negro servant. The letters and less important papers she hid in a basket of flowers with a note which she daringly inscribed: "Kindness of Lieutenant H." It was a dastardly joke to play on the young officer who had already helped her.

Then, from Colonel Hillbrowe, she begged a pass to Front Royal and got it. Out of pure deviltry, she induced Lieutenant H. to carry a third package.

The little party of three started toward Front Royal. But the Federals happened to have been watching Belle a bit more carefully than usual. She was stopped at the picket lines and taken with her companions to General Beale's headquarters.

Here the basket of flowers which the lieutenant carried was turned upside down. Out tumbled the package of letters. Lieutenant H., realizing, for the first time, how Belle had duped him, threw his other package on the table in fury.

Belle laughed scoffingly at him; that was all the thanks the poor fellow got for his pains. He was dismissed from the service in disgrace, while Belle went scot-free. Incidentally, her servant, who carried all the really important papers, was not even searched. Her return trip to Front Royal was finally accomplished by hairbreadth escapes from sentries and from Federal bullets.

Belle did not remain inactive long. When the Confederates advanced on Front Royal fort under "Stonewall" Jackson and Ewell, the girl learned of a counterplot in which four divisions were to unite in an attack on Jackson—Banks at Stroudsburg, White at Harper's Ferry, Shields at Front Royal, and Fremont in the Valley.

Apparently, there was no possible way to warn Jackson of the net which was drawing around him. But Belle did not know what failure was. So she set her uncanny wits to work to solve the problem. There was no time to enlist any one's help. She had no horse. The precious minutes were flying. She started out on foot to cross to the Confederate camp. She was sighted immediately. There was a spattering of bullets from Federal sharpshooters.

The girl kept steadily on, seemingly bearing a charmed life. Between cross fires of artillery, she compassed field after field, until at last she reached the Confederates. She was just in time. The news she brought her army enabled them to prevent General Banks from burning their bridges.

Jackson won a great victory—or rather Belle Boyd won it for him.

The girl was greeted with cheers

everywhere. She became the idol of the Confederate army. General Jackson himself wrote her gratefully:

MISS BELLE BOYD: I thank you for myself and for my army, for the immense service you have rendered the country this day. Hastily your friend, T. J. JACKSON.

Belle's fame as a spy had now become international. Sometimes she disguised herself as a negro mammy, sometimes as a man, but always, she accomplished whatever she set out to do. Her success in entering the Federal lines repeatedly, and in ensnaring young officers, and carrying letters and information back to Jackson at last brought an order from Stanton, as secretary of war, for her arrest.

She was caught, finally, through the one foolish act of her carefully conducted career. She had confided a letter, intended for Jackson, to a young Confederate officer. But this time, the "Confederate officer" happened to be a spy, like herself, and instead of taking the letter to Jackson, he turned it over to Stanton. This was quite enough to convict her. Her home at Martinsburg was searched and her captors, fearing her super-woman powers of escape, surrounded her with an escort of six hundred cavalry.

By Stanton's strict orders, she was not allowed to linger; she was hurried on to Washington under the immediate charge of a gruff secret-service agent who was known as a woman hater. Nevertheless, he was charged to steel himself against the wiles of his prisoner. Belle afterward wrote most bitterly of this man in her memoirs because he shut his eyes to her alluring smiles.

She was taken directly to Stanton, who told her just what he thought of her, and in no gentle terms. Then she was hurried to the Old Capitol prison, which was in command of Colonel Wood. Here she was made fairly comfortable.

Secret-service men, under orders from Stanton, tried to force her to take the oath of allegiance—at least, so she afterward wrote. In her memoirs she also quotes her own reply.

"Tell Mr. Stanton that when I take the oath of allegiance to the United States government I hope my tongue may cleave to the roof of my mouth, and that when I sign one line to such a declaration, my arm may drop paralyzed to my side."

George Lawrence, author of "Guy Livingston," came to America to study the Civil War. He gives this picture of Belle as a captive:

"Through the bars of a second-story window in the Old Capitol prison, which fronted each turn of my tramp, I saw this girl—a slight figure, in the freshest summer toilet of cool, pink muslin. She had close braids of dark hair shading pale cheeks, dark eyes which were made to sparkle, though the look in them was very sad, and the bowing down of the small head in utter weariness or worse."

Wood gives quite a different description of her.

"She was handsome," he says, "but in a hard way. Light, red-gold hair, blue eyes, a fine figure, an aquiline nose, a superb horsewoman, a dead shot—marvelous fascination. She was kindly, in a way; but always cold as ice."

Still a third biographer, Hamil Grant, puts her down as "sharp-featured, black-eyed, quick-tongued, of wonderful energy and spirit, and very free. She wore a revolver in her belt, rode a mettlesome horse, and easily attracted the attention and interest of the younger officers, from whom she extracted valuable information, though what the officers extracted in return, we are not told. She organized her own corps of women spies, who were very much of the same type and character, and if not worse than herself,

were, apparently, no better than they ought to have been."

There is one point, at least, on which these three chroniclers agree: Belle's irresistible powers of attraction.

During the seven months that the girl was confined in the Old Capitol, she made herself greatly beloved by her fellow prisoners. She nursed the sick and wounded with great tenderness, and through her mysterious influence procured flowers, fruits, and other dainties for them which they could never have gotten for themselves.

Belle was tried by court-martial, unanimously found guilty, and sentenced to death. But one might as soon sentence the devil himself to death.

While she lay in her cell awaiting the call to the prison yard and the firing squad, a sudden exchange of prisoners was made. Instead of shooting Belle as a spy, the government gently placed her on the steamer *Juanita* and sent her back home. In spite of Stanton's fiery protests, her marvelous super-woman lure again had won the day.

Soon after reaching home, Belle received a small package. It contained a gold watch and chain, incrusted with diamonds. The watch carried this inscription:

In token of the affectionate esteem of your fellow prisoners at the Old Capitol.

Nor was this all. Stonewall Jackson rewarded his most beautiful spy by giving her a commission in the Confederate army, and making her his own aide-de-camp.

His note, accompanying the commission, began with: "My dear child," and ended, "Always your true friend."

From this time on, Belle was constantly at work. No mission was too dangerous for her to tackle. She firmly believed that she bore a charmed life, and whenever any task requiring especial courage, quick wit, daring, and

resource was called for, the girl was invariably chosen.

General Sherman used to say that he would cheerfully have sacrificed a year's pay for the sake of trying her by drumhead court-martial and shooting her on the spot. It is said that there was a standing reward of five hundred dollars for any sharpshooter who should succeed in bringing her down when she entered enemy lines.

Then Jackson was fatally wounded at Chancellorsville. In his death Belle Boyd lost her best friend. The Southern officers rather detested her methods, even though they were compelled to use her.

At last, came Gettysburg. The tide of warfare turned. With the onward sweep of the victorious Northern troops, Martinsburg again fell into Federal hands. Belle was once more arrested by the implacable Stanton's order. The officers and sentries were warned against the powers of the dark-eyed siren:

"Don't let her get near enough for talk," ran the orders. "She'd charm the heart out of your body."

She was hurried to Washington, and put in Carroll prison.

One day an arrow flew in at her window. Attached to it was a letter. Communication with the Confederate world was established. Belle was soon at her old tricks again. Sometimes a strain of the song, "Within a Mile of Edinboro Town," sometimes a rubber ball lightly thrown from the prison window, carried news of moment. In one way or another, generally by ensnaring the soldier nearest to her, she managed to tell the Confederates the things they most wished to know.

In the midst of her lively operations, she was taken ill with fever. Her adoring friends at once made use of this excuse to appeal to Stanton for her release.

"No!" roared Stanton in answer.

"She is a cursed, dangerous rebel and spy! Let her die and be damned to her!"

Again she was tried by court-martial. This time she was sentenced to hard labor at Fitchburg prison, "for the duration of the war."

It is needless to say that the super-woman's harsh sentence was commuted, and she was ordered to "go South and never return."

Belle wandered through the Southland, receiving ovations wherever she went. At last she took passage for England on the ship *Greyhound*, hoping to spread Confederate propaganda over there. Incidentally, Jefferson Davis commissioned her to obtain all the money she could for the support of the Southern cause.

The *Greyhound* was a British ship, flying the royal ensign. It was running the blockade, commanded by Captain Henry. The third day out, the Federal boat, *Connecticut*, hove in sight, and gave chase to the *Greyhound* amid a rain of bullets.

"Haul down your flag," yelled Captain Almy, the Federal commander, as, finally, they overtook the fleeing ship. The flag was hauled down. Captain Almy ordered Lieutenant Samuel Hardinge to go over the side and take charge. Belle Boyd, unafraid, as usual, was near by.

Hardinge succumbed to her mystic charm at once.

"I hope you will consider yourself not as a prisoner, but as a passenger," were his first words to her.

Before long, Belle had persuaded the hapless Hardinge to allow the English flag to be hoisted again, while the *Greyhound* proceeded to New York.

By the time they reached port, Belle had so subjugated Hardinge that he was putty in her hands. She and Captain Henry laid a deep plot to gain possession of Hardinge's signal book.

Hardinge, pleading his love for the

beautiful, dark-eyed, soft-voiced Southern girl, was hopelessly blinded by infatuation. Belle, as she listened to her lover's ravings, was not at all blind—not even a tiny bit nearsighted—in fact, her vision was remarkably clear.

"Situated as I was, and having known him so short a time, a practical thought flitted through my brain," she writes. "If he felt all that he professed to feel for me, he might well, in the future, be useful to us. So, when he asked me to be his wife, I told him that his question involved serious consequences, and that he must not expect an answer until I arrived in New York."

As the boat went on into the Bay, Hardinge proposed again.

Belle promised to marry him on three conditions. First, that he would give her the signal book; second, that he desert from the Federal service; third, that he serve the Confederacy.

Hardinge, absolutely insane with love, threw over honor, principle, future, everything, for the sake of calling the super-woman his wife.

Next, she inveigled him into a plot to free his prisoner, Captain Henry. Henry was allowed to escape, carrying the coveted signal book with him.

Belle had taken the precaution of assuming the name of Lewis, while in Northern waters, as "Belle Boyd" had a decidedly unsavory taste in Federal mouths. So, at first, she was not suspected in connection with Captain Henry's escape.

Before long she was recognized by a Federal officer, however, and was arrested, court-martialed, and once more sentenced to death.

Again she was mysteriously saved, just in the nick of time. Her sentence was commuted, no one knows why. She was allowed to go to Canada, with the warning that she would be shot on sight, if she set foot on American soil again.

She bade Hardinge a fond farewell, promising to meet him in England.

"There being no one better, I shall have to marry him," she remarked.

She joined Captain Henry and Mrs. Henry in Montreal. When she visited Niagara, the Suspension Bridge was a perfect nest of police, with spies everywhere ready to capture and shoot her if she should put one foot over the line. But Belle kept her eyes very much open; she had no intention of being shot.

At last she managed to get herself over to England. Hardinge, meanwhile had been tried and acquitted of any connection with the Henry escape. Obedient to Belle's command, the poor youth had deserted. He was now awaiting the girl for whom he had thrown away everything worth while.

Belle and he were married on August twenty-fifth, 1864, at St. James' Church, in London.

Every one was there. Hardinge's father came forward with the funds for his deserter-son's wedding trip.

There was a wedding breakfast at the Brunswick Hotel. The newspapers were full of the affair; some denouncing Hardinge as a traitor who should be shot, others—Southern sympathizers—declaring he had done a noble deed in forsaking the Northern cause.

It was not long before Belle began to urge her husband to return to America, and to keep his promise to join the Confederacy.

"Her real purpose," says Saqui Smith, "was to rid herself of him."

If this is so, she certainly succeeded—for a while, that is.

Hardinge was arrested at Baltimore, as a deserter. For several months he was held in prison, then released and banished. He had been sentenced to hard labor for the duration of the war, but the British Ambassador—doubtless thinking to please Hardinge's fascinating wife—interceded and secured

permission for him to return to England.

Nothing could have been further from Belle's wishes. In her husband's absence, she had gone on the stage, and though she was a very poor actress, she was having a beautiful time breaking English hearts. However, when, after the war, President Johnson issued a general amnesty, Belle and her husband hurried back to America, where Belle seized upon the first pretext she could find to divorce the man who had sacrificed everything for her.

Having shaken herself rid of Hardinge, she tried the American stage. She became leading woman at the Academy of Music in New Orleans.

Almost immediately she married Colonel John Swainston Hammond. She was still in the early twenties, and radiantly beautiful. This was a love match, and the couple were fairly happy, though during the first years of her married life Belle was, for a time, confined in an asylum for the insane.

Hammond gradually became a drunkard. The couple drifted from place to place. Finally Belle sickened of her husband, and divorced him, keeping the custody of her children.

Her strange fascination never waned.

Men continued to adore her, and in 1885 she married for the third time "Nat" High, an actor manager, the son of a Toledo clergyman, was her latest flutter in husbands.

With him, Belle went on the road, giving dramatic recitals of her adventures as a spy. She traveled all through the North and South and was tremendously successful.

Finally, she settled down and devoted the last years of her life to being a good wife and mother. On January eleventh, 1900, she died, at Kilbourne, Wisconsin.

In spite of the bitter enmity of such powerful men as General Grant, General Sherman, and Stanton himself, all of whom, from first to last, advocated her death by a firing squad, she lived just as long as she wished to live. Against her charm, the greatest men of the age were powerless.

Just why she was so irresistible we do not know. There were rumors that, occasionally, she brought valuable news from the Confederate into the Federal camps, that her escapes from death were more than once due to her skill in playing one side against the other. But these rumors were never proved. And I prefer not to believe them.



LEAVES

THE twilight wind is groping
In dead leaves drifted down—
To lift a single gold leaf
Lifts many faded brown
And umber leaves and crimson
About the rustling town.

The winds of disillusion
May grope in thoughts that knew
Their source in heartstrings smitten
In me or stilled with dew,
And lift from brown and crimson
The gold that is for you.

GLENN WARD DRESBACH.

The Alchemist

By Agnes O'Gara Ruggeri

She stood, like Beauty carved in marble,
Still, imperious, and cold;
A goddess, more than woman, men esteemed her,
Perfection's classic mold.

And then Love came and touched the still, bound heartstrings,
And, lo, straightway, the pulses leaped with wine;
The sculptured cheeks were dimpled into smiling,
The carven lips forgot their classic line,
And, trembling, answered to Love's ardent pleading,
And sealed the pledge of faith divine!
Into those eyes, renowned for queenly glances,
There crept a tender mist all soft and mild,
Born of the sympathy that Love had kindled,
For every living thing, pure or defiled,
And e'en the haughty head, held high in regal splendor,
Bent low to soothe a child.

She stood, like Beauty carved in marble,
Still, imperious, and cold,
Till Love, the great Alchemist, melted
Her heart to purest gold.



A Touch of Sun

By Beatrix Demarest Lloyd

Author of "Jhundra,"
"The Murder of William Joscelyn Ferris," etc.



GORTON drank slowly of his lime juice and soda, staring at the rise and fall of the horizon over the steamer's rail. He seemed in no hurry to begin the story. Neither did his companions, stretched in deck chairs under the red awning which interposed between them and the equatorial sun, show any impatience. And, truly, there is an abundance of time spread out upon the Pacific waters.

"I never told this story before," said Gorton musingly, "because I never thought of it as a story. Up to a few days ago I didn't know the end of it, and nothing is a story until it has an end. Some of it I was told only just before the end came. I heard it because I knew McIntyre slightly, well enough to help the poor devil in his last bout of fever. It's an unpleasant yarn."

"Naturally," murmured Trusloe. "This part of the world was created as a background for that sort of thing. Though unpleasantness is to be encountered elsewhere—Brooklyn, Coney Island. Pray go on." He closed his eyes. "What was the lady's name? No gentleman ever tells. But what are we to call her?"

Gorton was good-natured about it.

"I shall have to call her McIntyre," he replied, "since I gave that name to her husband. The other man—"

"Give him any name you please, so long as it is not Trusloe."

"No," agreed Gorton, "I won't call him Trusloe. He didn't himself, though I always fancied his family had never called themselves Francis. He did."

Trusloe's eyes opened and closed again. He gave no further sign of interest. But Bicknell, the other listener, remarked:

"You said you had the end of it a few days ago. Not aboard ship?"

"Before I came aboard," said Gorton. "The beginning lies some ten years back, when I was consul at Paloango. The McIntyres lived there then. He had come out as manager of the Bodie oil matters; I imagine they paid him a large salary. It's the only big berth in the region, center for an immense territory. The Bodie ran its own ships, and McIntyre was monarch of acres of warehouse and a native employee to every square yard."

"They had a pretty house, quite a large house and inconsequently rambling, with rather more grounds about it than is usual. In the white settlement on Paloango most of the houses are set quite close together, with just a bit of garden in between. But the McIntyre place was big, rather rough, more or less unkempt. Vegetation is riotous in those parts, and the native gardener lazy. I was not often in the place, but it was easy to see that little interest was taken in it by the lady of the house. It may have been different when they first

came. Many things had been different then, according to the club gossip.

"McIntyre was a long, weedy chap; moody enough when I knew him, not to say bad-tempered. Mrs. McIntyre was a woman of undeniable beauty, but—well, she was not common, and she assuredly was not coarse, but there was a quality in her fiber which could never have been finespun. Paloango was an incongruous setting for her, though, of course, it cast a glamour over her, where good-looking white women are scarce. She was not vicious, or, apparently, even imaginative. Animal she was, in a lazy fashion. Perhaps all her qualities were lazy. She was the sort of woman who could have been happy in a theatrical boarding house. She needed stimulant of a common kind, gossip, admiration, what not. A man following her on the street quickened her color. She might have resented it as an annoyance, but she would have had to lie to herself that she did.

"Of course, she got admiration in plenty, and gossip, too, such as Paloango affords, but after her first few months of it, its sameness revolted her appetite. She was still hungry, but the food available bored her. She developed 'nerves,' not the high-strung, torturing nerves of an imaginative temperament, those of an educated, high-bred woman accustomed to the stimulating or soothing touch with cultural surroundings, but a cheap parody of discontent, a sneering, restless petulance. McIntyre developed nerves, too. His were plainly brutish. I fancy a few gaudy restaurants and a moving-picture house or two would have saved them both.

"The club, our only place of public amusement, was dull enough, God knows. Most men and a good many women got through the days and evenings under the artificial enlivenment which came in glasses from the bar. McIntyre plainly overdid it. Not

enough to jeopardize his position; the Bodie would have made short work of that. They had had men go to pieces in Paloango before this. But, after all, McIntyre's work called for no great concentration or initiative. He was regularly in his office, though in varying moods, neither loved nor feared by his clerks, and he did know how to handle the blacks. That last is an item in a company like the Bodie. Nobody minded his surliness; the colored men accepted it as inseparable from the Caucasian nature, and the white or partly white clerks probably thanked Heaven it was no worse.

"But his afternoon hours at the club, passing through a short stage of acceptable amiability, sent him home at dinner time no very agreeable companion. He treated his house servants very differently from those at the plant, and he and his wife gradually evolved an attitude toward one another which might be described as a fight-at-the-drop-of-the-hat attitude.

"Mrs. McIntyre was at first contemptuous, shrugging aside any notice of his ill humor. She did not object when he found fault with his dinner; she more or less silently agreed with him. She made no effort, however, to force variety into the menu, much as she herself might have appreciated it. That was a matter involving an effort. She had even less inclination for that than for the native-cooked—which means unseasoned—viands set before them. She enjoyed dining at the Paleys' or with the doctor and his wife, but she was too indolent to bestir herself about her own kitchen, tasting and amending as these women did. To McIntyre's grumbling or even swearing she merely shrugged and passed him the salt.

"This was when things first began to go wrong. At that time she was bored, indifferent, inattentive. She took on McIntyre with the heat, the bugs, the slovenly servants, the lack of entertain-

ment—with Paloango, in short. But then the nerves began to develop. Curiously enough, they began almost at the same time as her affair with Francis. Nobody—I dare say not even she herself—could have said which could claim priority.

"There was nothing remarkable about Francis. He was a good-looking chap, with a trunkful of good clothes and an excellent poker face. That was all we knew about him. I don't mean that he was a gambler. We played often at the club, where no one lost or won much. He just drifted into Paloango and stayed around, accepted and well-enough liked, and nobody missed him personally when he was gone. The fact that he left rather abruptly was, of course, part of the scandal which spattered explosively about when Mrs. McIntyre—I'm getting ahead of my story.

"He was one of the men to be found often enough on the McIntyre veranda; the lady of that ill-starred villa was always at home in the afternoons, only occasionally at the club. The other women did not seem to care much for her, but that means little enough either way. It certainly meant nothing to her. She was good-natured and lazily hospitable, and they went to see her or stayed away as they pleased. But when the fad seized upon her to surround herself with horrid pets they unanimously did the latter. It began with her having a pet spider."

"Spider?" ejaculated Bicknell. "Did you say a spider?"

"Yes, a spider," said Gorton. "It was nearly as large as a teacup, a very disagreeable bit of vermin, rendered harmless, I understood, by the simple surgery of one of her native cooks who gave it to her. She devised a home for it by tearing out the embroidered panel of an old-fashioned fire screen that she found somewhere about the house. How it came to Paloango I have no

idea. It does not matter. The spider employed its time weaving a web in the frame, presumably under the impression that it owed the food she gave it to its own industry. Mrs. McIntyre would wipe the web away, and the spider would patiently begin another."

"Well," said Bicknell, "that's a new one."

"You'll admit this part, at least, is scarcely likely to have happened in Brooklyn—or Coney?" Gorton's voice threw the question sidewise at Trusloe, but elicited no answer.

"I think he is asleep," said Bicknell softly.

"Most uncomplimentary of him," said Gorton amiably. "Well, when she found it annoyed her husband," he resumed, "she became quite attached to it. This was when she indulged her nerves, and began to amuse herself by goading McIntyre into irritable rages. She went in for a wholesale collection of pets of this class, utterly with a view to tormenting him. Paloango furnished her with a limitless supply of nasty fauna. When the women of her small social circle drew the line at contesting tea cake with an occasional lizard, she merely shrugged her shoulders and let them remain away. Some of the men dropped off as well—yes, myself among them. I, as I say, had never been there often. I was a very young consul in those days and grave about my official duties. And perhaps that is why I never met Francis."

"You never met him?"

"Well, it wasn't extraordinary, my not meeting him. I saw him about. It's quite long ago, and, perhaps, I was a little miffed at his not having called at the consulate. Even in a small community like ours at Paloango these things can happen. So the next slice of the story is mere—you notice I don't say pure—say-so and conjecture."

"Francis, it appears, rather encouraged her in her craze for distasteful

pets. Perhaps he, too, enjoyed McIntyre's rages. He was malicious and cruel, this man Francis, and undoubtedly infatuated with the woman. I think, perhaps, if there is an element of tragedy in the unpleasant story, it is that she herself cared for him, sincerely and deeply cared for him, underneath all the trashy passion of their affair. McIntyre, apparently, saw nothing of that. He detested Francis, naturally, but I don't think he suspected them. He came more to the club and stayed later. In one drunken moment he said there was no fun in going home to step on a liver-colored toad. Doctor Branksome thought he meant one of the two-legged variety, but I believe he meant just what he said. He had an almost frantic repulsion toward our crawling and creeping brothers—and he was drinking too much to control his nerves.

"Francis, pursuing his pleasant way, discovered this, found out, moreover, that McIntyre was really a coward about snakes, and, like the grinning devil in the old morality plays, he promptly introduced one into that Eden. His resourceful inamorata produced an article of furniture like a hat-tree, and the snake comfortably disposed of its length—which was considerable—in repulsive festoons about the mahogany branches. They fed it to surfeit, and it apparently accepted its new habitation gracefully enough. My knowledge of snakes is limited, but I was told that the creature seemed actually to love her. She petted it with her hands, and it gave sluggish signs of appreciation."

"I say!" Bicknell's disgust sounded in his tone.

"She wasn't afraid of the horrid thing, nor repelled by it. Well, she had worked up to it gradually. She may have been a little insane; Branksome thought so. I don't know. But to McIntyre it was mental and physical torture. He hadn't the courage to make way with it, and he writhed under the

8—Ains.

sneers of Francis and his wife. I believe he never entered his own home without making sure the creature was safely coiled on its tree, and even then he kept to some other part of the house. He told me—years afterward when he was so ill—that he spent nights of waking horror, wondering if he had neglected to close his door, staring and listening in the darkness, obsessed with the feeling that the unspeakable reptile was rippling toward him along the floor. Sweat would break out on his skin, and he would strangle with unuttered screams. Branksome said he was near enough to the imaginary snakes of alcoholic delirium without having a real one about, but certainly it brought him to the borderland of madness.

"I don't remember how long it went on. It must have seemed like some unending nightmare to him; the convulsive horror of the reptile, the nausea of seeing his wife handle it, the lash of having Francis—a contemptuously amused witness to his humiliation—all these to be endured by nerves in his abnormal condition.

"Well, the time came when he broke. Even raw brandy could not whip him down the road to his own house. We saw him, Branksome and I, lurch and waver in the path, and after a long, shamed immobility slink to the right about and shamble back to his offices. I shall never forget the look in Branksome's eyes as he brought them to mine. He had no need to speak.

"One reason, I suppose, McIntyre had never suspected his wife of more than her usual philandering with the men about her was his utter absorption in his own snake-ridden existence. He was not the man, and his whisky was not the whisky, to be afraid of Francis. Perhaps Francis knew that. Perhaps she knew it. God knows I saw in Branksome's eyes his sudden and dreadful belief that they had used their

loathly means to get McIntyre out of the way. He may have been right.

"But, personally, I have seen so much more drifting than active wickedness that I doubt it. However, as the days went on, as McIntyre still drank himself into the condition necessary to him, still spent his stuporous nights at the offices, as Francis by no means curtailed his visits to the masterless house, you may be sure Paloango gave the woman no such immunity from suspicion as did her husband. At the club it passed from whispers and gossip to downright, outspoken accusation. One heard of it so constantly that it almost resulted in our house committee having to pass a resolution forbidding the topic, not out of charity or any better motive than to save some of us from being bored to death.

"The old order held good in this case as in others. The husband was the last to hear of it. He had been drinking heavily and had fallen asleep in an unlighted corner of the veranda at the club, and was roused by voices from the room inside. In one of those phases of startling mental clarity which come to drunkards and lunatics under certain shocks, he listened and believed, and let himself noiselessly over the railing, bound for his home with murder in him.

"This part of the story he told me himself. It was long after midnight—probably nearer two o'clock than one. There was nobody about. The road held nothing but the moon-made shadows of the palm trees, and his own. He passed in at the gate of his garden without having met a soul. There were no lights burning in the house, but the moon made his way clear to him. Inside, it shone only in spaces giving upon the windows, but, knowing the arrangement of the furniture well enough, he made no noise. He went straight through the house to the rooms of his wife. Her sitting-room door was open

and beyond it her bedroom door was closed, as he could see because the moonlight lay across the upper panels. He stopped there a moment, his heart pounding and his open mouth dry. And then he heard the voices, low-pitched and murmurous, from her room. He remembered that a light chair or some such object fell near him—he must have flung out an arm—and that there was a sudden movement in the room beyond and then an utter silence. He did not remember crossing the room, but he found himself falling backward from the door as before it there slowly upraised a stiffening length of the great snake till its head poised in the moonlight, moving slightly to and fro."

If Trusloe's eyes opened and closed again it was lost in Bicknell's fervent ejaculation of the name of the Deity.

"McIntyre crouched appalled, flung back as from a smiting glare of lightning. No angel with a flaming sword could have debarred him from that door, nor from the murder that he came to do beyond it, but here was a guardian of the gate he could not pass. Coiled in a pool of black darkness on the threshold, and only the upper part of it visible, it thrust upward like an arm from hell. The man, shaking, sobbing, sweating, faced from his shadow that evil, oscillating head, faced it and could do no more."

"There were sounds, stealthy, tantalizing. He may have heard steps, he may have been sure of the creak of her veranda window, or it may have been a tightening and flexing of the snake's overlapping lengths which made a rustling noise. To McIntyre, those few moments seemed eternity itself. He tried to tell me in all the hot delirium of his fever. I, certainly, in cold-blooded ease, cannot attempt to give you any idea of the ghastly horror that crushed a lifetime into those short minutes.

"A light was made in her room, and, presently, her door opened. She stood there, a silk robe thrown over her night-dress, her hair loose about her. 'What is it?' she said, like some one roused from sleep. 'I heard—' The snake softly clattered down at her knee, and she put out her bare foot with a queer, gasping laugh, and pushed the creature from her. 'Was it only you?' she said, and gave a hysterical giggle. 'My God, was it only you?'

"She pushed it again, and the snake poured out its length upon the floor, paying no heed to the man in the shadow, and slowly, obediently, shuffled out into the corridor. Then McIntyre sprang at her."

Decidedly it was the mean advantage of any story-teller, particularly of unpleasant stories, to pause here, but Gorton had seen an approaching steward and made a sign to him. He came toward them, Bicknell watching inattentively, and Trusloe, with his eyes closed, paying no heed.

"Yes, Mr. Gorton? Another lime sour?"

"If you please. And—" Gorton glanced at Bicknell.

"Scotch," said Bicknell, rendering up his glass.

The steward accepted it in an out-held hand, but he was looking at Trusloe attentively.

"Get you anything, Mr. Trusloe?" He stepped to the man's side. "Brandy and soda? Brandy straight, sir?" The steward, instead of going upon his errand, moved nearer and leaned over him. "Feeling all right, sir?"

Gorton and Bicknell turned at the question, but Trusloe merely opened his eyes for a brief moment.

"Quite," he answered.

The steward went away.

"Well, go on," said Bicknell, after a moment. "McIntyre sprang at her and—"

"All this part of the story," went on

Gorton, after another moment of his own, which had held a short look of concern at Trusloe, and a bringing back of his gaze to the languidly rising and falling ship's rail, "all this part of the story, you will understand, I had from McIntyre but a few weeks ago. It was never known in Paloango. I won't say there was no suspicion of it; for I don't know that. Paloango was as full as most places of suspicious people and a deal fuller of idle people, which is a bad combination. But, if there was any such talk, I never heard it, and until I saw McIntyre again, just recently just before he died, I, personally, had no reason to doubt that we knew the truth of Mrs. McIntyre's death. But I am telling you now what he told me.

"His hour of lucidity had gone, shattered by his encounter at the door of her room, and he could give me no details—thank Heaven—of what happened, except that he remembered, with the dread of her plaything in him even at that moment, closing the door behind him as he thrust her back upon her bed. Her silk dressing gown had come away into his hand, and he twisted it around her throat and strangled her."

"He told you?" said Bicknell, looking with some awe at the man who had been intrusted with such a confidence. "What did you do?"

"I took him some ice cream," said Gorton, with a story-teller's innocent pride. "It's not in the hospital menu at Paloango, but my hostess very kindly sacrificed a good deal of ice for the purpose. Very good it was, too. I had some myself. I suppose you think I should have rushed off and sworn out a warrant for his arrest. What do you think I am, a policeman?"

Bicknell continued to eye him, but with varying expressions, ending in a vague sort of resignation as the steward came back with his tray of glasses. He inattentively accepted his Scotch, while

Gorton took a drink of his lime and water. The steward put a rather startlingly large glass of brandy into Trusloe's hand and seemed to hesitate near him as he drank it off. He appeared to be better satisfied after it was done, accepted the emptied tumbler upon his tray, remarked that it was very oppressive weather, looked again at Trusloe, and went away.

Gorton lighted a cigarette, and settled back in his chair.

"That's about all McIntyre remembered of that night, except a single, vivid recollection of thrusting the silk robe deep into a hamper of used linen somewhere about the house. He was found in the morning about half a mile from home, lying in a drunken sleep by the roadway, and was supposed, quite naturally, to have fallen there on his way home from the club and to have been there all night."

"But murder—" began Bicknell, in a protesting way, as if he had not got over Gorton's reference to his procedure in receiving McIntyre's confession.

"I am coming to that," said Gorton. "He was found, as I said, dazed and possibly more evidently drunk than he had been the night before, after a search had been made of the house for him. Mrs. McIntyre's maid and a house boy had discovered her death. They had gone to her room with her breakfast tray and dishes, had found the door open, and had seen the snake slip heavily from the bed and lumber out the French window giving on the little veranda or balcony outside."

"You mean to say—"

"I mean to say," assented Gorton. "Yes, when McIntyre, his wits momentarily cleared by a stiff administration of whisky, faced the authorities who had been summoned to the house, accompanied by a half dozen brown, bare-footed policemen, and remembered what he had done, he was informed with a quite unanticipated gentleness

that his unfortunate wife had been done to death by her own ill-chosen household pet."

Bicknell fell back against his chair as if to emphasize his appreciation of this.

"And, of course, he let it stand?"

"And, of course," said Gorton, finishing his lime and water, "he let it stand."

"Well, I'm damned," remarked Bicknell, after a short silence. "But what about Francis?"

"Francis, it had appeared, had gone. There was a steamer sailing early that morning. He had gone aboard very late the night before, but so had a number of other people, and the news of Mrs. McIntyre's death did not reach the town until long after the ship had sailed. It was thought a macabre coincidence, to be sure, that he should have gone away that very night, and should not have known her end. But how much of a coincidence is it when one knows at what an appropriate hour he considered himself to have withdrawn?"

"He may not know it to this day," said Bicknell.

"To this day," repeated Gorton idly.

"This day is a deuced hot day," suggested a voice near them, and they turned to see the ship's doctor amble forth from the companionway. He stood looking at Trusloe, whose eyes had opened as he spoke. "You feeling it?" he asked. "Perkins seemed to think you rather groggy."

Trusloe did not move.

"He certainly brought me grog," he said a bit impatiently. "It is hot. I had a touch of sun once, and I suppose I feel it more than most, as Mrs. Gummidge says."

"Well, take it easy," said the doctor.

"I did," returned Trusloe, and closed his eyes again.

"I'm glad to hear it. It was a stiffish drink," remarked the doctor as he strolled away.

"There is more to your story, Mr. Gorton," said Trusloe, with a rising reflection that yet did not make a question of the statement.

"There is, as I have said, the end. It came, as I have also said, a few weeks ago. Being in this part of the world, an idle impulse came upon me to put over to Paloango and look over my old haunts. It has been more than ten years since I left there, and I half expected to find it unrecognizable and half hoped to see it unchanged. What I did find was more or less the latter. I must confess that the harbor, laid like a white-jade bracelet about that arm of the sea, was as disturbing a sight as the old photograph of an unforgetten sweetheart. I dare say I had often hated the place when I was quartered there, but when I came back to it, I was stirred as with an ache of longing.

"I ran across Doctor Branksome in my first hour ashore, free from semi-official meetings. We had luncheon together at his house—he is a widower now—and it was not until he roused himself from the usual lethargy which follows excellent midday meals in these latitudes that he said suddenly, 'I say, you knew McIntyre?'

"'McIntyre?' said I. 'Yes, Bodie. Oh, I remember. Yes, yes.'

"Branksome sat down again. He had risen to prepare for his afternoon calls. He sat turning his tobacco pouch over and over in his hands. The pause that he made drew my attention sharply. He looked up.

"Did you ever think McIntyre a bit mad?" he asked. "I mean then—long ago. He hasn't been about here for years. They sacked him shortly after his wife died. You remember about that. He was drinking then, but, Jupiter Pluvius, how he drank afterward! Yes, the Bodie sacked him, and he drifted around, disappeared, reappeared, borrowed, and shifted and sponged. Poor devil! Well, he's back

here now, dying of alcoholic rot. I've got him in the hospital. I've often wondered—"

"What made you ask me if I thought him a bit mad, in the days when I knew him?" I asked. Branksome hesitated.

"It seems so rotten cold-blooded to analyze a stricken man," he said. "But I'd give a good deal for your opinion on his mania. You knew him then: you should see him now. I suppose"—Branksome's voice trailed off into a murmur—"a man can go too far in vivisection. I give you my word, Gorton, I wonder sometimes if I may not be touched myself." He laughed and rose again. "Come and see McIntyre. And forget I was such an ass."

"Well, I didn't want to leave it at that and I was willing enough to go to the hospital with Branksome, but I give you my word I could have wished he was a garrulous sort. I toolled about it as best I could.

"Alcoholic rot," said I. "That's enough, isn't it, to send a man off his head?" Branksome was silent a long while, mulling it over. "Yes," he said, "but he's got a definite fear. Most of 'em have snakes—McIntyre's got a snake, one—the same one."

"Same as what?" said I.

"Same as every day," said he. "Oh, that's not unusual! Only this snake never comes. God, I'm used to men seeing things! But a man who expects things and never sees a damned thing!"

"You mean, he expects to see a snake?" said I feebly. Branksome gave a short laugh.

"Doesn't sound serious, does it? He worries me."

"I could see that he did, and I could see that, in an odd way, when the nurse met us with the news that McIntyre had become violent, Branksome was somehow relieved, somehow felt as if the matter were one he could cope with.

"I stood talking to the nurse while

the doctor made his way down the whitewashed corridor, and then, suddenly, it came to me that I stood in the old McIntyre villa. I exclaimed some such phrase, and the nurse answered calmly that the old hospital had been abandoned owing to the cutting of new streets and laying of new drains and that they had only moved their patients on the previous day to the newly prepared house.

"It did come to me then, in a vague way, that the old surroundings might be too much for a man in McIntyre's condition, but I never thought of the snake. Why should I? I never thought of the lizards, and the spiders, and the general run of his old torments.

"Branksome came hurrying back to me with a message from McIntyre. He wanted to see me. 'You'll tell me,' said the doctor. 'Oh, go to hell!' said I. 'Write your pamphlet on your own skin.' But we were good friends, and he did not misunderstand me.

"I went to McIntyre, I——"

Gorton paused and drew out his cigarette case. Bicknell looked at his cigar. Trusloe looked at nothing.

"I don't pretend," said Gorton, after a pause, "that I wasn't horrified. I have never before seen a human being in the exhaustion of horrific fear. I don't fancy you ever have. I hope not. He was wilted to the bones. But it was not only alcoholic rot. And it was not madness, I believe. Branksome was trying to fit him into some theory or deduce some new formula from him. But how could he? For McIntyre would not tell; he would only, in moments when his mental anguish outstripped his determination not to tell, implore them to keep the coming reptile from his bed.

"I took my turn—as he so dreadfully adjured me—sitting beside him. His fever mounted and waned—I mean his physical fever. His mental states were merely one worse than another; his lu-

cidity when he told me what I have told you was only less harrowing than his paroxysms of apprehension."

"If you don't mind my asking," said Bicknell, half breathlessly, "what apprehension?"

"He thought in a hallucination that the snake which had been his wife's plaything, on which he had left the burden of his wife's murder, was seeking him for its own revenge. Mind you, as he had gone over it afterward, he had no knowledge of his wife's infidelity. He had become convinced that the snake knew of her innocence—Oh, Heaven knows what he became convinced of! But he lay there in that bed as he had lain in the same house years ago, waiting for that secret, rattling sound, the unbearable sound of the serpent, moving toward him over the floor.

• "I sat with him, as I said, often—sometimes during the day, sometimes at night. The hour meant nothing to him. He was waiting. He never mentioned Francis, after he told me what he had heard that night on the veranda of the club. He was not concerned with Francis. His haggard wits were waiting for that visitor. Otherwise he never thought of death, never wished it, never feared it. He seemed to know.

"Paloango went its cheery, lazy way, unheeding. Branksome was no tattler, and I fancy even the Bodie people did not know McIntyre was in the place again. I was out one night as an official guest on board a United States cruiser when he died. It was not until the following morning that I heard of it. Branksome, rather shaken and weary, came to tell me of his end. The doctor seemed, for a time, to have lost his pathological interest in the case and to be merely a spent friend. He sat in my room saying over and over again,

"'Make of it what you can. He was strangled. The orderly saw a great

snake slip heavily from the bed and lumber out the window giving on the balcony."

In the silence which was a tribute to Gorton's sense of climax, the steward came back along the deck and paused again.

"Anything for you, gentlemen?"

"I think," said Trusloe, getting slowly out of his chair, "I'll have a drink sent to my stateroom. I'm done."

As he turned away, Bicknell looked after him.

"I wonder, now, if he should take

brandy," he said. "You know, after a touch of sun—"

Gorton yawned.

"He's got medical indorsement for it. Queer sort of chap. I keep thinking I've seen him somewhere."

"Maybe in Brooklyn. Or Coney Island," said Bicknell with an idle laugh. "He's been to both places, apparently. I wonder if 'unpleasantness' includes sunstroke?"

Gorton tossed his cigarette over the rail and rose lazily.

"To an unprotected head," he answered inattentively, "the sun smites, the world over."



ON REMEMBERING AN OLD LOVE

THIS foolish love of ours was but a dream,
We were not mortal when we met and kissed;
The limitable human barriers we missed,
We flowed along on some soul-drowsing stream.
Little of you was real. Your lips, your eyes,
And all the quiet tenderness I knew—
They were but shadows, they were all untrue,
They were but ghosts who walked on phantom skies.

That day you held me closely to your breast,
That joy of touch, that sweet, ecstatic sense,
The time we trod the soul's starred eminence;
The ethereal passion, the immortal zest
That in no earthly words could be expressed—
All this was dream, sleep, and inconsequence.

MARYA ZATURENSKY.



An Angle of the Triangle

By Ethel Watts Mumford

Author of "Aurore,"
"A Pupil of Raphael," etc.

SOME wait at the crossroads of life for the finger of Fate to point the path and then meekly follow directions. Some, when the Great Indicator reveals itself, are moved to passionate and, not infrequently, successful opposition. Others hesitate until propelled onward by the shove of Circumstance or the boot of Necessity—but once in a blue moon there is one who—

Ann Quartel suddenly found herself at the parting of the ways. At least Paul had paid her the compliment of frankness. He had elucidated his position without care for her hurt. He had, in fact, dwelt with unction upon "his duty to the other woman." At this juncture Ann laughed, and her husband stared at her, evidently wondering whether this was hysteria or scorn. It was neither. Ann was remembering this peculiarity of the masculine mind. She had met it before when called in to prescribe for friends with matrimonial complications. Later in the conversation she did not laugh. She was nearer tears.

"You've never had children, you know," he said judicially. "Of course, that isn't your fault."

"I've often suggested adoption," she answered dully. And his shrug dismissed her statement as it had often before dismissed the plea.

"I want my own, *my own*," he repeated sullenly.

"That is nothing but vanity," she countered. "If you honestly wished 'to know hereditary traits,' and, as you say, 'feel a personal and private blood interest,' we could long ago have taken your brother's orphans."

She had read him aright, and his resentment flashed. Had he not felt the necessity of his wife's co-operation with his plans, he would have flamed to insult and ridicule. But he dared not.

"Of course—you don't understand. But the fact remains, that we, Miss McGrain and myself, have agreed to marry. It rests with you whether we can do this with decency and legality, or whether we shall be forced into illegality. We shall be very grateful for your help and understanding."

She stared at him. This man she had known for twenty years, whose wife she had been for ten! And how greatly she had loved him! She had loved his beauty and his charm of manner, his delicacy and nicety of taste in all things. She had loved all the outer manifestations, but the mind and heart and the soul of him she realized she had never known.

They were alone in her private office, the sanctum* of that great business she had been brought up in, inherited, developed, and lifted to its present

international importance—the great industry which was an expression of herself, the industry with which she had striven to endow her husband. She sat at her mahogany desk, her fingers buried in the masses of her ash-blond hair, her troubled, sapphire eyes fixed on the quadruple inkwell before her. On the other side of the slab of varnished wood—and on the other side of the world—stood Paul Quartel, like an employee awaiting his discharge. She looked him over, as if, indeed, this were the case, silently weighing his failure. She could not help analyzing; it was second nature to her. She realized that his winning boyishness really indicated dependence mixed with a youthful disdain for experience. She had loved his good looks, had always been acutely conscious of his physical appearance. For his handsome face and alert, graceful figure she had spent herself and her life.

He was but a boy in mind and initiation. He had need of her strength. What would he accomplish without her? Nothing. He had fallen in love with the youthful loveliness of a girl. How long would it last? Not long, she felt sure. Now he was flattered, and she knew the height and depth of his vanity. He would need her, need her sorely in the days to come. What would he do with that cheap, gaudy female? He was incapable of directing her or himself.

The moments lengthened, till, unable to bear the tension any longer, he exploded:

"For God's sake! Ann, stop mussing your hair!"

She sat up as if jerked erect in her chair. In a flash of realization she covered a whole continent of logical deductions.

If her personal peculiarities had become so distasteful to him, it was, indeed, the end. His angry exclamation was the pointing finger of Fate.

"All right, Paul," she said quickly. "I'll not block the game. Now, if you'll go, I'll think things out. You'll be going over to Ironton, I suppose, to tell her the result of our interview. Take the car, if you like. I'll have Madison run me up to the house in the flivver. Sorry to have to ask you to continue the negotiations with the Chrome Steel Company. Be in the office around ten to-morrow, when Cadman comes. I have to be at the flume. Report to me at two."

He nodded, held out his hand, and had the grace to blush and stammer like an engaging schoolboy.

"Thanks, Ann. I ought to have known you'd understand."

The touch of his fingers burned her.

"Good luck!" she said thickly.

He was gone. She remained seated before the worktable, immovable, save for the clawing of her fingers through her hair. Becoming conscious of the almost automatic movement, she jerked her hands from her head and folded them before her in a white grip. "For God's sake! Stop mussing your hair!" She seemed to hear again his exclamation of concentrated irritation. Was she *that* hateful to him? She had many eccentric little habits and was aware of them—with mild amusement. She always rumpled her hair when she worked, when she talked of important matters, when she was excited. She would come from a directors' meeting with her ash-blond locks erect and scrambled into strange coiffures. The members of her staff soon learned to gauge the day's business by the condition of that oriflamme. It was the plume of battle tossing above their leader. She wondered how long he had loathed her mannerisms, and, unconsciously, in the stress of her feelings, her tense fingers sought her tousled, aching head once more.

Womanlike, it was this personal touch which went home. Did he hate

her habit of leaving pencils all over the house? Her passionate love of animals that made her bring home all sorts and conditions of strays, and insist on their omnipresence? She knew he disliked her children's parties. Their noise disturbed him; he had no patience with questionings and persistence, for all his loud-voiced craving "for children of his own!" Had he grown to dislike her love of blue, the color in which she dressed, and affected in all her surroundings, from the paint of the motor cars to the sofa cushions and lingerie ribbons? Was the jangle of her many turquoise necklaces an irritation, and the clatter of her bangles?

She rose from her chair sharply. The bludgeoning of Fate could not cow her spirit, or wring tears and lamentations from her soul. There were adjustments to be made, matters to be reasonably discussed and arranged. She faced a terrible ordeal, but she faced it head high and with level eyes.

She had never seen Ivy McGrain, and knew but little of her. She was a beauty, she had heard, and private secretary to Gantly Cords, of the Cords Rolling Mills. Gossip, ever busy, where a pretty face is concerned, had buzzed with waspish stinging about that golden head. If old Cords had had her educated, it was only natural. She was the daughter of a trusted foreman, killed on the open-hearth. But wealthy men who "assist girls to an education," if the girls be comely, will ever suffer questionings and sneers. And when he employed his ward as private secretary, it was as if he had offered affront to every other female employee in the county.

Ann had left the business of the firm in the outlying towns entirely to her husband. She seldom left her desk except for Chicago, or the East and West coasts; therefore, for years she had been out of touch with the offices of Ironton, of Cardick, or Wilton.

Paul's confession had found her wholly unprepared. Had she had an inkling, she would have understood his tempers, his strange moods, and a thousand trifles of manner and speech which needed but a word to prove illuminating. As it was, her amazement mercifully stunned her feelings. The shock of surprise momentarily blinded her to the magnitude of the disaster.

Automatically, she left the office and summoned her car. The short drive to the mansion on the hill seemed endless.

She entered the house. Mysteriously and suddenly it was home no more. Blue, blue everywhere. She wondered if that overshadowing sapphire tone which matched her eyes had been hateful to him, because it expressed her. Her maid took her wraps and inquired perfunctorily as to the dinner hour.

"Mr. Quartel has gone to Ironton," she told the servant. "Tell Sato to serve dinner as soon as he can. I am very tired." *Gone to Ironton!* The words seemed to rouse lonely echoes in the room. *Ironton!* The word clang'd like the irrevocable closing of a metal door.

A nine-days' wonder. The divorce and the marriage of Paul Quartel with the secretarial beauty; their departure for the West; and then, routine. No one thought again of Paul Quartel, except the lonely woman in the great house on the hill. It would have been a ten, even a twelve days' wonder, had they known that the mistress of the city's smoking forges was keeping in close touch with her former husband; that a law firm in a city half a continent away was keeping her informed of everything which concerned the new ménage, and that in a locked compartment of Ann's desk were snapshots of the conventional, suburban villa which was their home.

When the telegram—to all appear-

ances a business message of slight importance—was delivered, announcing the birth of a daughter, the discarded wife, who had had no children, sat up half the night, the crinkled, yellow paper in her hand—thinking. *His* child, that should have been hers! She knew in her heart of hearts that had there been children, it would have made no difference in his life. They would have served, perhaps, to prolong an irksome companionship, but, in the end, it would have been the same. He had the temperament of intrigue combined with impatience. It would have been the same—but not to her.

She often tried to imagine what she, had she been a mother, would have done under the circumstances. She could see herself resisting, determined to hold the father at any cost, and she disliked the picture. Then she pictured herself, happy with her little one, independent, in that love, of any other need; but her virile mind objected to the bondage her emotional nature craved. She wandered in darkness, but the fact remained like the thread in the labyrinth—*his* children belonged to *her*.

Five years. The business under her skilled and sane direction had prospered beyond belief. She was a woman of importance, numbered among those the country called great. The public was regaled with magazine and newspaper items concerning her. Her fancies, her fads were anecdote and legend.

And now, there were two babies in Paul Quartel's home—that small, conventional, suburban villa which remained unchanged, except for the deterioration of wear and tear. Ivy Quartel, alone, had improved in appearance. Whatever Paul earned in his new employment went to the adornment of his pretty wife, about whose golden head, here, as formerly, the hive of gossip buzzed and stung.

The youngest baby was but a year old when Ann made a surreptitious visit to the city half a continent away. Under an assumed name, quietly dressed and thickly veiled, she came to the Palace Hotel. A glance at the telephone book informed her of the address she wanted. A hired touring car took her about the town, seemingly haphazard. With a tightened heart, she beheld the familiar façade of the yellow villa, with its plot of overdecorated lawn and garden, and on the porch, a vision of blond loveliness, in a smart-appearing frock, whose cheapness of material was disguised by its ultra-fashionable cut. The blond vision was in arch conversation with a well-tailored man in riding clothes. On the grass a colored maid idly pushed back and forth a shabby, rattan baby carriage, while a black-haired child in bedraggled pink rompers played with a smeared and grimy doll. The child looked up. It was stamped with its father's likeness as if with a die. A thrill of fierce possessiveness flamed in Ann's veins. She almost called to the driver to halt the car, but she controlled and composed herself.

The house and the playing children passed from view around a turn, but their image lingered. The vision, too, of the beautiful, gaudily dressed young woman, the impression of her manner, provocative, even suggestive, in spite of the presence of the nurse and babies. It required no more than this one glance to diagnose the situation. The young mother knew her beauty, cared more for admiration than for her home, more for the showy claptrap of her personal finery than the appearance of her house, or the well-being of any of its occupants. There was the impression in her lightly poised figure of a bird about to fly. A glow of impending satisfaction permeated Ann Quartel's being, a foreknowledge born of logic and keen insight.

There remained Paul. How had he developed? Where did he stand in his household? Ann could surmise, but she wanted to be sure. She knew where he was employed, and she guessed at what hour he might be expected to lift the latch of his garden gate which sorely needed painting.

In the abstraction of weariness, Quartel failed to notice the woman in unobtrusive black, though her path had paralleled his for some time, on the other side of the street. But nothing about him escaped her. The sag of his tall figure, the forward droop of the shoulders she had known so athletically erect. His clothes were unpressed; they were not shabby exactly, but they were lacking in that sense of "being worn." They were thrown on, rather—the pockets bulged, the knee mark was plain in the overwide trousers, the coat collar was wrinkled. His handsome face was still the same, but the boyishness that had been its chief charm was gone, rubbed out by care. There were lines from nose to chin, lean, mouth lines visible even at a distance. There was no jauntiness in his carriage. At the gate, he paused. It was not the pause of ecstatic contemplation with which the man greets his home, with deep inner content—"Lo! This is mine!" It was the pause of one nervously himself for an irksome task.

The strident shriek of welcome from the black-haired child made him wince perceptibly. There was a sensible instant of hanging back; then he opened the gate with nervous fingers and met the onslaught of his small daughter. The woman on the opposite side of the street crossed diagonally. She was just behind him, within hearing.

"Daddy! Daddy!" the child sang-songed, dancing on untidy feet, over which soiled socks festooned, and putting up a smiling, jam-smeared face to kiss.

He pushed her aside, and his voice was edged:

"Gad! Ellie, don't come smearing me! How many times have I told you not to paw me over if your hands and face aren't clean?"

The child wiped the offending hands on her frock, and resmeared the right one by wiping her mouth with the back of it. She showed no surprise or resentment at her father's greeting.

But Ann clenched her hands passionately and walked on at a rapid pace. How dared he talk like that to the child that should have been hers! How dared the other woman neglect her duty to that child! Her fury carried Ann half across the city. For more than an hour she walked as if pursued, but at the end she had seen the road of the future—seen it as if looking down from a high mountain, seen its final destination, and every turn and curve of its length. She did not need the finger of Fate to point the way. It was as if by her will she blazed the path, cleared it of all obstacles.

Her purchase of the big house on the hill adjoining and back of the villa was a simple matter. Through her lawyers it was accomplished without her name appearing in any way. Three weeks from the day of her arrival, she was installed in the huge, old-fashioned mansion. Servants were engaged, decorators had swept the old order and disorder out of existence and substituted whatever of comfort and adornment she dictated.

The neighborhood was interested, naturally. Neighborly curiosity was fed, as she intended it should be. An eccentric widow, every one was told, had bought the place. She was somewhat of a recluse and wealthy. Her husband and children had been lost in some vague sea disaster. She wore mourning and went heavily veiled.

Ann had arranged for a protracted

absence from her offices. She had been planning, and she had adjusted her affairs for more than a year. She had trained a capable representative, and a weekly trip in her great car to a neighboring town kept her in telegraphic and telephonic touch with her business. The rest of her time was hers. Very soon she had made friends with Elvira—"Ellie," her father had called her. "Vee" she was christened by the new Lady Bountiful. The baby she cajoled from the colored nurse. Soon she made the acquaintance of the blond and lovely Mrs. Quartel.

The daylight hours were Ann's undisturbed. Paul was away at his business. On Sundays she never went out, pretending conventional seclusion. Thus she avoided the possibility of meeting Paul, and her appearance, as it might be detailed to him by his wife and the chattering Elvira, could never have suggested her.

Indoors she wore white. Her environment was cheerful; everything that could lure and delight a child, from fantastic toys to carefully prepared goodies, was always to be found with her. It was not long before Elvira's mother discovered in the willing neighbor the most perfect of alibis.

Should she be missing from her home on one of her many surreptitious excursions, she could always tell of a motor trip in the big gray car, or an afternoon spent in the lady's company. She discovered she was being deliberately shielded—once, when the negro maid had need of her mistress, and called at the other house; again, when telephone calls were relayed. Nothing was said, no favors were asked, no confidences were made; but the young wife's recklessness increased as she felt the shadow of that protective presence. On the children, the intimacy had the most beneficial effect. Lavish tips to their ebony nurse produced a marked change in their appearance. Even the

unobservant father realized it without knowing the source. Quaint dresses that set off the older child's elfin beauty appeared as if by magic, dainty frocks for the baby—fascinating, fairy things.

"She musta been plumb crazy 'bout them chilluns she lost," explained the "mammy." "She jest nachually kayn't get eruf o' them babies. An' as fer Ellie—she doan know her name no mo'. She's 'Vee,' shore 'nuff. But de missus, she doan see nuffin'. Long as she's got dem white kid shoes an' her ha'r in a Marcella."

Very soon the gifts of the Lady Bountiful were extended to include the mother of her little visitors. A hat of the best Paris make, a wrap, a fur. Carefully and wisely Ann fed the fire of extravagance. She advised the little blond parasite as to the enhancement of her beauty, with a deftness and knowledge which produced results. Like all vain women Mrs. Quartel accepted everything without question, even without gratitude, as tributes to her loveliness. Ann was always admiring, always willing to listen to complaints, always sympathetic of the admiration of others.

A few months had given her the easy affection of Ellie and the warm, relaxed confidence of little Gwen. Those months had also added to the brilliance of Ivy's butterfly wings, and had bred a taste for rare honey in that gay, ephemeral creature. It had been easy to accept beautiful things from the friendly woman, who loved her children so much; it became easy to accept gifts as costly from another donor. Ann noted a gold mesh bag, and asked no questions. The only person not surprised when Mrs. Quartel left for Europe with her lover was Ann.

She sent her maid at once to the bereaved husband, asking that the children be permitted to come and stay with her. In the big house, they would

not note their mother's absence, and they could be properly cared for.

Shocked, stunned, and helpless, Paul welcomed the offer. He did not know where to turn. His children were an enigma to him, and both his wife and the nurse had been loud in the praises of the competence and kindness of the providential neighbor. He went about his business as one in a dream. His incompetence was evident even to himself. His passion for his young and beautiful companion had been blurred by irritation and failure. His pride, more than his heart, was touched, and his soul turned in unspeakable longing to the memory of strong, reliable, devoted Ann—Ann, whom he had betrayed, Ann, who had taken his treachery standing, met his cruelty with comradely kindness. She had seen him through the mess which had preceded his fool marriage to Ivy. She had gone on with her work grandly, successfully, true to him yet, he felt. Never a man's name had been linked with hers in the almost daily mention of her in the news, never a rumor of marriage. Good, strong, friendly Ann!

And then the miracle happened. A representative of a firm of lawyers called upon him. The representative came to the house, a suave, competent, little man, and, with beautiful tact, elucidated his errand. Mrs. Ann Quartel had commissioned the firm to see him. Mrs. Quartel had heard of the disaster which had overwhelmed him. She was most particular, was his client, to have it understood that she did not desire to intrude into the affairs of her former husband. But for the children, *his* children, she was deeply concerned. Could she not offer them her fireside and the best of care? Mr. Quartel, of course, knew that the former Mrs. Quartel was a woman of unlimited means. For the children's sake the offer was a most fortuitous one.

The position was, of course, difficult, but any one, who had known this wonderful woman so well, must rest assured that she would more than fulfill any duties and obligations she offered to undertake. The ambassador was most conciliatory, almost deprecating. He evidently expected opposition and explosion. Could he have read his listener aright he would have seen a surge of relief, a great load lifted, a most unregenerate gladness.

Paul's hesitation was only outward. At the very first comprehension of the offer, it was as if all his unformed prayers had been answered. The boyish look returned to his face, as if touched in by the brush of a clever painter. Responsibility, care, worry departed. It was as if a sponge erased the name of Ivy from the blackboard of his mind. Her vision became only a memory of a series of pretty pictures, and a prickling sensation of petty torments. He was heartily glad she was gone. He wasn't bereaved at all. He had been a silly fool, like a boy who runs away from home. And, miracle of miracles, she'd take him back!

Ann would take him back! She had offered to make a home for the children—because they were *his* children. But the riot of his happiness almost made him betray himself. He called a very lame dignity to his assistance, and in his reply tried to curb the joyous words of his acceptance. He managed a few bromidic phrases—"for the children's sake he must forget himself." "He had always entertained the deepest respect and admiration for the former Mrs. Quartel." "Oh, yes, he intended to apply at once for a divorce! It would be wisest for the children that they should be placed legally beyond the reach of their unfortunate mother."

The lawyer's delicate suggestion that it might be well for the members of the former life partnership, now dissolved,

to meet and discuss the matter, Paul managed to meet with an appearance of condescension. A city halfway between his present place of residence and that of his former wife was mentioned. A day was set. Dizzily Paul received the courteous commendations and congratulations of the emissary, who would, he said, immediately communicate with his client. She would, without doubt, be anxiously awaiting his answer.

"It is not often," he purred, "that Providence so quickly manifests itself." His parting handshake was like that of the friendly undertaker, assuring the bereaved family of a speedy meeting in heavenly spheres.

Time lagged and crawled till the appointed day came. For the first time in years Paul dressed with care. His heart beat, his blood prickled, his every breath was painful with excitement.

In a dim, overupholstered recess of a conventional, hotel reading room, he at last came face to face with Ann. She rose to meet him, pale, compelling, calm. He wanted to run to her, to lay his head on her shoulder, and weep tears of relief, of home-coming. His voice and his hand shook.

"Poor boy!" she said. "Poor boy, did you think I'd forgotten you?"

At dinner that night they discussed

their plans, happily, like two young lovers.

"I'll notify my employers," he was saying. That Ann included him went without saying. "I'll go and bring the children on. They are staying with a Mrs. Farn, a neighbor of ours, a friend of Ivy's, who has been very kind—"

"No," she said; "not a friend of Ivy's—a friend of yours. You see, I got worried about the children. I managed to come on—to—to look out for them. I'm Mrs. Farn, you see."

Paul stared at her in amazement.

"Ann! Ann!" he exclaimed. "You wonderful—"

"Oh, no, not wonderful!" she deprecated. "But, you see, I always felt that your children somehow belonged to me." She was as innocent of her ruthlessness as motherhood personified.

Another nine-days' wonder. The extraordinary Mrs. Quartel had remarried her divorced husband and adopted his two little girls! What a paragon of virtue! What a monument of forgiveness!

On this occasion, however, Ann did not analyze, as was her habit. Had she done so, she would have said:

"I arranged that another woman have my children for me." In point of fact, Ann had seen the road of Fate—and built it.

ARE MEN EVER ATTRACTIVE?

And on what does their charm—if they have any—depend? Good looks? Subtlety of manner? Chivalry toward the fair sex?

ANICE TERHUNE

the author of the long-popular "Super-Women" series

is now preparing the most astounding and wholly fascinating group of biographical fiction ever published. Watch for

"KINGS OF HEARTS."

The Shoplifter



By Henry Irving Dodge

Author of "Skinner's Dress Suit," etc.



I AM a physician, an M. D. Also I have delved more or less deeply into the mysteries of psychology. It is because of this fact that John Ferguson and his wife, Helen, patients and dear friends as well, asked me, Samuel Phillips, to hear their story and give them counsel. Theirs is a story of heart, a story of misunderstanding, a story of surprises all the way through. I learned it from both sides at one and the same time—a most unusual circumstance. The whole thing was told me—unreservedly told me—by husband and wife as we sat at cigars and coffee in a room lighted only by the flames of an open fire. Come to think of it now, I believe that half-light effect was purposely arranged that I might not too clearly observe the faces of John and Helen as they told me their story.

Philosophers claim that disaster is the basis of comedy. Whether they also claim that love is the basis of tragedy I don't know. But I do know that it is. John's and Helen's story will illustrate what I mean. In writing as I do, for publication, I am in a way betraying a confidence. But I shall not mention real names, only fictitious ones. If John and Helen read

this story, they may be assured that the secret of their identity is safe with me.

John Ferguson's mania was gambling. Wall Street was the scene of his operations. He was a successful lawyer of thirty-five and he had trust funds in his possession. Helen was seven years younger than John. She knew that he had other people's money in his hands, in trust, and because of his mania for gambling she was afraid. Now John didn't gamble to make money, for he was perfectly sure that he couldn't make it that way. To him the passion was like strong drink to the drunkard—almost irresistible. I am not saying this in extenuation of what John did. Helen's weakness or strength, as you shall decide, was her love for John. If she hadn't really loved him, there would have been no tragedy. She loved John with the quick-burning love of the sweetheart, the steady-burning love of the wife, the love of the mother which nothing can quench—a reënforced love. And Helen trusted. But still Helen was only a woman.

Mind you, I knew nothing of what these two very dear friends and patients of mine had been going through, actually experiencing, until on the fore-

going occasion they called me in to listen and to counsel. There was a note of deep depression, even a suggestion of disgust, I fancied, in John's voice as he talked.

"It's the story of a passion," he began, "a mania that creeps on and possesses a man before he realizes it." He paused and looked straight into the fire. Helen regarded him solicitously, patted his shoulder fondly, encouragingly. As for me, I only waited. Presently John went on, went on in a monotone:

"I was hitting the Street, you know, Sam. It's the old story, too trite to tell you—that part of it. It was the same old bunk those rainbow chasers, those Ancient Mariners of the Street, give out to any one they can button-hole and bore. I was the wise one. All the rest of them were fools down there—those fellows who knew all about properties, who could give you minute details, statements, reports, earnings, losses, surpluses, and deficits for years back, who personally knew combinations of operators and what they were doing, whose familiarity with affairs ought to have made them millionaires, but who were always broke, and who confided to you that it was because they had overplayed or overstayed the market or that they had let their profits run into losses or had done other like, incredible, imbecile things. Oh, yes, those derelicts had charted the sea of disaster, all right! But I couldn't see the rocks. I was color-blind. Red lights were meant only for fools. I was the rare exception. I'd cut my losses short and let my profits run. I'd always be protected by stop-loss orders. It was too simple for words. But I hadn't reckoned on the personal equation part of it—the old devil that always gets us."

John groaned and hesitated. Again Helen patted him on the shoulder encouragingly, and he went on:

"I hate to tell what a fool I was,
9—Ains.

what a criminal. Yes, that's it! A criminal, an unconvicted criminal! The wickedness of it, Sam, was that I realized all the time how it was hurting Helen." He threw his hands apart with a gesture of disgust. "But I consoled myself with the specious excuse that it was all for her, that a little suffering didn't matter, that it would all be compensated, wiped out by the joy she'd feel when I should bring home the pot of gold I was going to dig up at the other end of the rainbow." He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head slowly, indicating resignation to the inevitable. "Well, I paid no attention to the red lights ahead or, if I did, I was sure I could stop before I reached them. I didn't realize I was heading straight for"—he dropped his voice almost to a whisper—"the jail doors."

Again John and Helen stared into the fire. This time she didn't put her hand on his shoulder. I wondered why. The words "jail doors" never sounded like that before to me. The sound was awful, portentous. What had John done to suggest jail doors? Clearly, he had escaped them—that is, so far as I knew. But how? And I want to say right here that I felt no anger toward John's great weakness, even though it involved Helen, whom I loved as a daughter. I felt only compassion. For I loved John, too.

John wet his lips and continuing to stare into the fire, went on:

"We're coming to the point now. Then trust funds were put into my hands. You know, Sam, old Danforth's money."

"Great heavens," I thought, "the Danforth kiddies!" I'd brought them both into the world. I began to understand. It was because of the Danforth kiddies as well as because of himself and Helen—the combination—that John wanted my counsel, mine in particular.

Now I, being a physician, am practical as well as sympathetic. No sooner does a complaint present itself than I seek a remedy. So at John's words I instantaneously ran over the amount of my resources, which were considerable. I was prepared to make a sacrifice. But I was determined—and I can be as stern and resolute as the devil, even with those I love, when occasion arises—that if I did help John out, it would be with the understanding that he would never again accept the custody of trust funds. Presently I asked, as quietly as my feelings would permit:

"How much were the trust funds, John?"

"Wait," said John. "Let me tell it in my own way. As I said, I didn't realize my danger just then. It was Helen who sounded the alarm. She was genuinely frightened when I told her of the trust funds. She threw off all reserve. She reminded me that I was just as human as other men, just as prone to weakness. She urged that I had the money of helpless children in my hands. She pleaded with me to sell out my holdings in the Street, even at a loss, and go away with her somewhere, anywhere, even for a short time, for a change of scene, diversion, and excitement. 'For,' she argued, 'gambling is not like the passion for strong drink or women. A hiatus, a break, is apt to bring a man to his senses and cure him of it.'

"But the Street was my mistress now. I saw nothing but the pot of gold. I speciously denied Helen's appeal. I put on bumptious airs, protested that I resented her doubting my integrity, and all that kind of rot." He paused. "And now I'm coming to the worst, Sam."

John glanced sidewise at Helen. She put up an arresting finger.

"Wait, John. Let me say something first, something in extenuation. Let

me prepare Sam in a measure for what he's going to hear, because if you don't, I wouldn't have the nerve to sit here and listen to what you're going to say—the shame of it."

I reached over and took Helen's hand. Her words had distressed me. "Don't," I said. "Don't tell me any more, unless I can actually help you."

Helen looked searchingly into my face—a curious look, as I now think of it.

"You won't think so bad of me, Sam," she said, "when I tell you how miserable I was—how utterly miserable. John began by operating in the Street with money we had earned together—for I had helped him in his work. I resented that. But at most it only meant pocketing our losses and beginning over again. But supposing our money had given out and John had been tempted to dip into the trust funds just as I knew other strong men had been tempted and had fallen? For I'm not blind. The papers are full of Wall Street tragedies every day—trust funds violated, children made destitute, faithful clerks going astray.

"Things were always coming up to torture me. Every one who called on us seemed to be a Wall Street victim, dismal, desperate, always dinging into my ears the danger of the Street. And, too, I could see that John was changing. He was getting to be nervous, morose. He would tolerate no word that suggested anxiety on my part." Helen clasped her hands. "And the torment of the picture that was always in front of me—the Danforth children broke, beggars, made so by John's act! And I felt guilty, terribly guilty, just because I knew all about it and didn't do something, even to invoke the law, if necessary, to restrain John and save them." She covered her face with her hands.

"I saw John a broken man. I saw the proceedings of the law, in my

mind the whole, horrible proceedings. That's how much it got on my nerves." She groaned. "I actually saw John with handcuffs on his wrists. Think of it. And I saw a group of lawyers there as he stood before the judge waiting to be sentenced. Some of them looked disgusted, others sneered, and others were sad—very sad indeed."

John looked at me.

"You'll damn me for what happened later, Sam, I know. But let me tell you I was about to tell Helen everything, tell her what I'd done. I had tried to convince her of the unshakable character of my integrity, demonstrate it to her. But when she got more and more fearful I made up my mind to tell her all. Then something happened that changed the whole scheme of things." John paused, breathing hard, paused for a long moment; then, pulling himself together, he asked Helen very tenderly: "Shall I go on, dear?" "Helen's face was turned away from me. I could see only her profile. She nodded. John put his arm round her and drew her close.

"You see," he went on in a kind of apologetic way, which perplexed me, "I thought Helen was worried about me only. I thought that was why she wanted me to go away where she'd feel that I'd be safe." He turned and looked straight into the fire and muttered, more to himself than to me: "I never dreamed such a thing was possible!"

"Hang it all! Believed what possible?" I exclaimed impatiently, feeling that somehow John was evading the issue and continuing subconsciously to balance my resources against the possible defalcation he was about to confess. What could he mean? Helen's words, "the shame of it," had an evil sound. Could it be possible that John had involved Helen in a way not wholly innocent? She had known what he was doing. She had realized

the danger. But she'd taken no steps to prevent it.

"Ridiculous!" I concluded after a moment's reflection. "John, possibly—but Helen? Absurd!" Helen belonged to one of those splendid, old American families, sane and strong on both sides, the very flower of modern civilization. As a psychologist I had been interested in the influence of ancestral traits. I had watched Helen carefully. She was proud, she was broad-minded, she was beautiful. And the basis of her moral fiber was stern New England honesty. I had bragged about her to my scientific friends. She was the living, speaking proof of my theory that high quality begets high quality. Absurd, ridiculous, preposterous!

"Don't hurry me, Sam," John went on. "I know how you feel, but I must tell it in my own way." He paused as if feeling about for a beginning. Then: "Presently," he said, "I noticed that Helen's importunings ceased. She didn't seem bothered any more about Wall Street or trust funds. She no longer urged me to go away. I couldn't quite understand it, but I was relieved. And then one day I came into the room unexpectedly. Helen was lying on that couch there, reading a small book. She seemed startled at my appearance. After a few minutes' talk I left the room for something and when I returned Helen was gone. I went over to straighten up the sofa pillows and underneath one of them I found this little book, the one Helen had been reading. It was a work on criminology."

John took a small volume from the table and passed it to me.

"See, there's a page turned down."

I took the book and read the chapter heading indicated: "Obsession and Its Cure."

"I was greatly touched," John went on. "I understood now why Helen's importunings had ceased. The dear

girl was seeking a new method to cure me."

"I don't see why you should be ashamed of that, Helen. It was to your credit," I interjected.

"Wait, Sam. You don't know yet. Let John tell."

"Very good," said I, puzzled.

"I replaced the book," John went on. "I didn't want Helen to feel that I'd been spying on her. But three days later I chanced to go into a closet in Helen's room, looking for a hatbox of mine. Lying beside the box on the top shelf I found this."

John took from his side pocket another small volume and handed it to me. Again I observed a turned-down page indicating a chapter heading: "Kleptomania." What the deuce?

"Go on," said I.

Helen's face was still averted. John stroked her forehead gently and put his fingers over her eyes in a caressing way.

"Well," he went on, "one day I discovered, quite accidentally, a small, but quite expensive brooch in a pin tray on Helen's bureau. I'd never seen her wear this particular brooch. Without knowing it, subconsciously, I associated the jewel with those books and their turned-down pages." John turned to me. "Sam, I don't understand the operations of the human mind as you psychological sharps pretend to."

"Pretend is good," I thought.

"But instantly I realized, or thought I realized, or discovered, if you like, that Helen hadn't been urging me to go away on my own account, for my own safety, but for hers."

As I said before, I am a scientific man. My professional experience has given me poise. I almost never betray outward symptoms of shock. That would never do for an M. D., you see. But in this case my heart was involved to a degree I'd never thought possible

till this moment. I had all I could do to keep from betraying my feelings.

"Go on," I said in a voice which sounded hollow to me.

"I was ashamed of my suspicions," John went on. "I felt degraded that they should have taken any hold upon me at all. I felt a traitor to Helen, a sneak. But a fellow can't reason himself out of that sort of thing, you know. Well, as days passed, the torture I was suffering grew more acute, until in sheer desperation I began a systematic search of the house. I didn't do it, mind you, with the purpose of finding anything, but with the constant prayer in my heart that I would come across something, some circumstance that would explain, that would clear Helen, that would rid me of the disgusting doubts."

"Why didn't you ask Helen at once?" said I.

John threw his hands apart.

"I was afraid, Sam."

"Afraid?" said I.

"I didn't want her to think I suspected her. I couldn't believe it myself." John paused to regain the thread. "As I proceeded with my search, I came across bit after bit of evidence—a ring here, a little brooch there, a pin, a bracelet. Now Helen had no charge accounts with jewelers. She had no money of her own nor had she asked me for any—that is, in any amount sufficient to cover the purchase of those jewels. Where did she get these things and how?"

John stroked Helen's forehead very tenderly as her head rested against his shoulder.

"Sam, to show you how reluctant I was to believe, even to suspect, I consulted Blackton—you know, at headquarters. I did it because I was afraid my emotional attitude toward Helen had impaired my reason. I put her case up to him in a hypothetical way. Blackton contended that the circum-

stances and symptoms I described were characteristic of one who has a mania for—"John hesitated—"taking things. Also he pointed out that the presence of books bearing on the subject and containing suggestions as to how to correct the misfortune, books apparently secreted here and there, indicated that the victim was conscious of his weakness and was striving to overcome it."

"But after getting Blackton's counsel, why do you ask me to advise you?" I suggested.

"Blackton's a criminologist; you're a psychologist. And, besides, two heads are better than one."

"I get you," said I. I lifted an arresting finger. "Why go on, John? Why drag Helen through this ordeal?"

But John persisted.

"Sam, it's necessary that I should tell this story in my own way." Then, rather resentfully, I fancied, he said, "I'm a lawyer. I guess I know how to proceed." He turned upon me. "For God's sake, Sam, you don't think I'd drag her through this unless it was necessary?"

Helen put her hand on John's shoulder and said to me:

"Let him tell it his own way, Sam. Besides, I don't see why I should be spared." She was silent for a moment, and as she looked at me again I fancied there were tears in her eyes. "Perhaps you won't be so hard on me when you understand."

"You don't know how I suffered," John continued. "I saw the poor girl held in the grip of this devilish vice. I saw her going from shop to shop, taking a trinket here, a trinket there, always fighting against it, always giving in. I presently felt that she was suspected, and I felt a positive animal hatred for those who might try to punish her. I even saw myself flaunted in court by my enemies. And I cannot tell you of the rage I felt for all—the police, the sleuths, the judge, and the

jury! But no wounded pride had a part in my hatred, Sam; it was primal, an instinct to protect. I forgot everything else. I had only one thought—to protect Helen. Right or wrong, she was mine. Right or wrong, I loved her, loved her more than ever."

It took John a few moments to pull himself together; then he went on calmly:

"Sam, I never believed that a passion could be killed by a sudden shock. But the shock I got drove all thoughts of Wall Street out of me. I proceeded to compare Helen's weakness with my own. I reasoned that if my confidence in Helen could be shaken, how about my confidence in myself? After all, I reflected, does a man know himself any better than he knows another person? Up to this time I could have conceived of no circumstance under which Helen would have done such a thing. She'd rather have died. Now, if my love for her had led me into such an error, might not my self-love, egotism, lead me into a false sense of my own security?

"I was like a sleepwalker who wakes up to find himself at the edge of a precipice. Scared? I was scared stiff. The danger of it flashed into my consciousness. For, you know, the very nature of my profession makes me the custodian of other persons' money."

John's last words suggested the obvious question.

"But, John, what the devil has Wall Street got to do with all this? I don't see the connection. You start with one thing; then suddenly switch off on to another."

"It has everything to do with it, Sam, as you'll see. Just wait."

There was a long pause. Just what was going on in John's and Helen's minds, I don't know. They were both looking into the fire. I could see only their profiles. But I do know what was

going on in my own mind, in my own heart. I felt a certain relief, but only on account of the Danforth children. On the other hand, the knowledge of Helen's misfortune caused me deeper sorrow than any mistake John might have made—even criminal mistake. Why should Helen, of all women, have fallen for so contemptible a curse as kleptomania? What was the secret of it? What motive could she have? Liquor, neglect, social ambition have driven women to crime. But Helen had suffered none of these. She didn't have to steal. And she didn't wear the things after she acquired them. Clearly, she had no motive at all.

What freak of nature had done it? Every circumstance surrounding her family or concerning her own life, which I knew of, screamingly scouted the possibility of crime; therefore her tacit confession dumfounded me. My faith in my own scientific invulnerability, my faith in my system for determining things, was shaken. I had studied Helen's ancestry away back—Robinsons, Fahnstocks, men who had fought under Washington—not a crook in the whole line. But perhaps there was some kind of a break which had escaped me, some circumstance which might throw light, for proud families don't often conspicuously exploit eccentricities. Perhaps there had been interjected into Helen's ancestral line through some marriage not prominently noted some singular, to use a mild word, strain. I determined again to scrutinize Helen's ancestry, microscopically scrutinize it, with the particular tendency, kleptomania, in view. But, willy-nilly, it rested with me, the professional adviser and personal friend of John and Helen, to effect a cure, if it took every bit of my professional ability, every bit of my fortune. And I should set about it this very night, immediately after I left them, and in my own particular way.

Pursuant to this resolution, I am
"I shall be going now, John. You'll
hear from me later. I'll—" But John interrupted.

"Wait. You must know more. What I've told you isn't enough for you to base a plan of action on or to advise me."

John passed me another cigar, lighted one for himself, and proceeded.

"Sam, like yourself, I'm a man of action. So, once convinced of Helen's great misfortune, I decided to take her away, for a change of scene, any kind of diversion, anything to save her. I sold out my holdings in the Street, made all arrangements for Hecksher to look after my business. He's been associated with me for years, as you know."

"I didn't know just where we were to go. If necessary, I'd take her round the world. Money, of course, was the question. We'd lived up to our income. And it would take quite a handsome sum, more than I could raise on what securities I had, so I determined to sell my camp up North. I realized that a forced sale like that would mean a great sacrifice, but I didn't care. It was Helen—first, last, and all the time, her salvation. And just then, one of those curious coincidences happened, stroke of fate, you might call it. Browning had a client that was stuck on the place, an old fellow that had been nosing round, nibbling. We had been temporizing with him, holding out for a higher figure. I told Browning I was prepared to let the place go and asked him to get the old man's top figures. Another bit of cursed luck" John scowled. "Browning told me that I'd flirted with the old codger so much that he'd got tired and had gone and got a short option on another place. But Browning confided to me that if I could get and put in his hands a minute description of my place within twenty-four hours, he'd undertake to

wing the old man back. Otherwise he was afraid his old client would execute the option on the other place which would expire in forty-eight hours.

"That was mighty short notice under the circumstances, for I realized, to my great dismay, that the papers containing the required, detailed information had been left up at the camp. There was but one thing to do—make the journey, secure the papers, and return within twenty-four hours. I told Helen I had been summoned before the court of appeals and must leave for Albany at once in order to be on hand bright and early in the morning. I didn't want to tell her what I was about to do, fearing that she might make strenuous objections to my closing out our place at a sacrifice.

"On leaving the Grand Central I noticed that the day, which had been brilliant, was now overcast. Presently particles of snow began to fall against the car windows, and when we reached Spuyten Duyvil I saw that the ice on the river had turned from blue to white. The circumstance was not reassuring to a man bound for the Adirondack region. At Poughkeepsie ice boats were shooting spouts of snow through their runners, and when we reached Albany the snow was already some inches deep and the wind was beginning to blow with the force of an incipient blizzard—from the northwest, that devilish Lake Ontario country. You know, beautiful in summer, hell in winter. When I left my little branch-road train late in the afternoon, the snow had swirled and eddied into drifts knee-deep and over.

"Sam, you may find erratic, unaccountable inconsistencies in my mental procedure during my trip up there. There's no doubt my reasoning powers were impaired, emotionally thrown out of adjustment, by my anxiety for Helen. Dominating me all the time was the fear that the machinery of the

law might even now be at work, stretching forth its hands into those very wilds even. I reasoned that it wouldn't do to let the station agent know I was there. It would be a conspicuous event with him, a midwinter visit by me. Also he was a telegraph operator, accustomed, during the season, to transmitting social items to the big newspapers for a consideration. He might send a line to the New York papers. No, it would never do to let him or anybody else know that I was there. So I dropped off the tail end of the long train far below the depot and, without being seen by anybody—so far as I knew—cut across a point of woods to the road which led to my house, some two miles back. I had cause later to regret this act of folly, the result of nervous and apprehensive over-reasoning.

"I calculated that I could, without difficulty, walk to my house, secure the papers, and return in time to catch the three-o'clock train in the morning. For most of the distance the road, little more than a wagon trail following the easier natural grades, made a slight ascent. Being a man of experience, I proceeded at a moderate pace in order to conserve my energies. The deep, frozen ruts which underlay this first snow of the season made walking exceedingly difficult."

John had been looking straight into the fire, talking in a monotone, but he now turned to me.

"You may wonder, Sam, why I am bringing in the circumstance of this trip to the mountains. You may wonder what bearing it has on the matter of my Wall Street folly or Helen's misfortune. But, Sam, it has a very direct bearing. In fact, it was due to a circumstance incidental to this very trip, a psychological circumstance brought about by physical conditions, that my passion for gambling was killed, killed as dead as a doornail.

"As I said, walking was particularly arduous. To make matters worse, the wind that had blown strong and keen at Albany now blew with great force and dead ahead. For some time I buffeted the tempest, turning first one side and then the other to it. I could feel my energy waning, the surface energy that was in me. But I knew from experience that there are wells of energy in us that may be brought into use by acute emergency. How to summon this reserve force was the question. A sudden drowsiness possessed me. I was tempted to sit down at the side of the road and rest. But I knew the hazard of such an act, for lethargy is the forerunner of surrender to extreme cold. I could feel my legs giving way and the fact shocked me into a realization of my plight, alone up there on that tempest-stricken mountain." John groaned. "God, how alone I was! It seemed as if I were the only man abroad that night, in the whole world. I saw my body up there in those God-forsaken, untraveled wilds. In disgust I damned myself, damned my over-reasoned folly, in not letting the station agent know of my coming.

"But I contemplated the presence of my frozen remains with little feeling. The agony of it was that I couldn't help Helen. She wouldn't even know what had become of me. She'd think I'd deserted her, run away. I saw her helpless, without a friend, in the clutches of the law. I saw her in a cell, roughly treated by brutal jail matrons. The accumulated rage which filled me acted as a shock and unloosed the deep-laid springs of energy in me, and I pushed on with fierce impatience, regardless of physical obstacles. And as I pushed on, the curious conceit came to me that Providence had brought me up here, had purposely staged the scene, had summoned the blast from the north to smite me with helplessness to make me realize, see the light. For now, in

my suffering for Helen, I knew what she must have suffered for me. I cursed aloud in my rage at my folly. I cursed Wall Street. I cursed all gambling. The very thought of it was abhorrent, nauseating to me now, like the thought of food to a seasick man. Sam, right then and there that passion died with me."

For a moment John was silent. None of us spoke. Then he went on. "Well, I finally reached the camp. I unlocked the front door and opened it. It was like going into a tomb. The place was inky black. By my directions, the windows had been so carefully boarded up that there was not even a crevice through which a shaft of light, reflected from the snow, might have lessened the gloom of the place. Mechanically I felt in the change pocket of my overcoat for a match. None there. I rummaged all of my pockets. Not a lucifer in any one of them. I stood still and reflected, then went through my pockets again to make sure. No use. I felt a touch of apprehension. Then I began a search. I groped my way to the mantelpiece. I felt for any possible receptacle that might contain a lucifer, clumsily upsetting a vase which fell shattered to the floor. I thought of the ash receiver on the table and, leaving the mantelpiece, made a dead-reckoning course for that object. Here my fingers upset a corn cob pipe, scattering the ashes on the green baize cover. I found a jar of tobacco and a small urn containing cheroots. With deft and careful fingers, I investigated every inch of that table in the inky blackness and found everything except the coveted lucifer. I dipped my fingers into the inkwell and transferred some of the contents in dots to my tan overcoat, as I afterward noticed."

Just a moment. Let me digress. Even though I was deeply moved, absorbed, by John's words, the picture

painted touched my sense of humor. One can't control one's sense of humor, you know. Right here was an illustration of the claim that disaster is the basis of comedy. Could anything be more ludicrous than John groping about for matches in a dark house, upsetting bric-a-brac and pipes, sticking his fingers in an inkwell, and dotting his tan overcoat with thumb prints, cursing his luck as he went, the humor of it made exquisite by the fact that he was in a desperate, a tragic plight? I glanced at John. Obviously, he didn't see the humor of it, for he went on in a solemn, dry, monotone. Even when he admitted using profanity, he did so in a matter-of-fact way as he proceeded.

"I knew where those papers were located. Possibly I could find them without a light. I groped my way to my desk, one of the principal receptacles of documents and the like, barking my shins against chairs and other objects which seemed most unaccountably out of their accustomed places and cursing as I proceeded. Profanity seemed awful in that darkness. In a deep drawer I found a bundle of papers. This I carried out on to the front porch and strained my eyes to make out any writing that might indicate the nature of the documents. But the writing was fine and the ink of that cheap quality one buys in a country store; ink which fades readily. The package contained some thirty papers. I would have thrust the whole thing into my pocket and made off with it, but because of the indistinctness of the writing I was not certain that the coveted document was included in the precious bunch. I savagely threw the package of papers on to the table, damning that kind of ink. I damned country grocers for keeping that kind of ink. I damned everything that related to country life that permitted the use of such ink.

"I could not wait for daybreak for I would miss my train and reach New York too late to make the deal with Browning. And I must have the money in order to take Helen away at once. So I started to make a systematic search of the house for matches. I began with the basement, the rear of which served as a cellar. Under pressure, my wits became acute, the lucifer match department of my mind was pulled out, as it were, and the contents laid bare. There wasn't a single match anywhere!

"Disgruntled, I gutturally damned Helen's super-thrift. Why in the name of goodness had she not left a few of the precious lucifers for just such an emergency as this? Then I recollect I had written Helen, because of a circumstance which I shall relate, warning her of the danger of leaving matches where rodents could get at them, and inclosing a clipping from a fire-insurance paper which gave startling facts. What in the world had possessed me to write such a letter, I reflected. Had I noticed any matches about where rats or mice could get at them? No, I couldn't remember such a circumstance. So I mechanically pursued my search.

"There was no place but the garret left—a forlorn hope. Rodents, yes, I thought, plenty of them. But matches, no. Then, suddenly, I had an inspiration!"

John paused while I wondered where he was leading to in his narrative. He went on then:

"You remember, Sam, Robinson's camp, just a stone's throw away from ours? Just across a shallow ravine? And here's a circumstance that has particular bearing: traversing the depression and practically connecting the houses like a rope is a line of very inflammable fir trees, a circumstance that had caused me some anxiety. Mark that, Sam. Very good. One day last

summer Robinson and I discussed the plans of our respective garrets. After observing my own, we visited Robinson's. The particular point of difference was the location of a dormer window. I noticed on the sill, as we stood talking, a box of matches. I can see it now—a faded, brown, little box, quite flat, with the trade-mark in blue on the side, and a lot of pink heads sticking out through the unclosed end. They were not safety matches, I noticed, only common things one might light anywhere. I thought at the time that there was danger of combustion from the concentrated rays of the sun through the window or from rodents, and was about to suggest the thing to Robinson when he complained of the stuffiness of the place and we went downstairs.

"The next day I was summoned to New York. I did not see Robinson before I left. On the way down I sat for a portion of the time on the sunny side of the smoker. It was not until we'd left Utica that I lighted a cigar. After doing so, I laid my match case on the window sill. Presently I found the little box had become quite warm from the concentrated rays of the sun. The incident suggested the box of lucifers in Robinson's garret window, and devilish possibilities came to me. I saw the little pink heads, superheated by the sun, start to burn. I saw Robinson's house in flames. Thank goodness, it was midday, and the children were out of doors. Nobody could be harmed. But matches were notoriously attractive to rodents and rodents preyed at night. Then I fancied I saw the little Robinsons fleeing the flames, their nightdresses on fire. I could see the flames running along that line of trees that connected with my house.

"The thing got on my nerves so badly that I determined to leave the train at Albany and wire back to Rob-

inson to have the devilish thing removed. I actually penned a wire to that effect. And it must have been the physical act of writing that telegram that fastened the lucifer-match scare in my consciousness. When we reached Albany I was so absorbed in the business I was bent on that I forgot to send the message to Robinson. And the incident of the box of lucifers was submerged in my consciousness and was not brought to the surface again until summoned by this, my extreme emergency. By jingo, I thought, could that box of matches be there still? Then the curious conceit: could it be that destiny had foreseen my distress and had thus provided for it? Had destiny hammered the incident of the lucifers into my brain for the purpose which it now seemed about to serve?

"I went down to the front porch and looked out across the valley, instinctively calculating. The snow had ceased falling, the wind was still strong, and the moon was high in the heavens. The idea of breaking into anybody's house, even friend Robinson's, was repugnant to nature, made even more repugnant by my professional experience in defending burglars. But Helen must be saved. Scruples be hanged! Very well, then—to act.

"I knew Robinson's house to be nailed up as tight as mine. But there was a window in the area that might be forced. I got a cold chisel from my tool box to use as a jimmy, and set out for the near-by camp. It was an easy job to force the area window and I found myself in Robinson's kitchen. I groped my way to the foot of the stairs that led to the upper floors. I negotiated the first landing safely, and proceeded to mount the second stairway.

"At the chamber floor I paused. I don't know just why. For I knew the location of the door that opened on to the garret stairs as well as I knew my

own. It must have been a subliminal warning—animal instinct—but I realized, yes; I felt that I was not alone. I had heard the scamper of disturbed rats in the basement. But I knew that sound. I wasn't afraid of rats. The animal instinct that is in us all made me stand still. I even opened my mouth and inhaled that way to prevent the sound of breathing through my nose. I must have remained like this for half a minute, and then I felt something cold, hard, unmistakable, pressed against my forehead and then a growl: 'Friend or foe?'

"Friend," I stammered. "Neighbor."

"Don't move or I'll shoot." A pause. "Light here, Bill. I got him." Then, as a burly figure appeared holding aloft a smoking kerosene lamp: "Here's a neighbor that's come to burglarize the house. Hands up!"

"Meekly I obeyed.

The Bill person put the lamp on a stand and frisked me with the adroitness of a headquarters man. Then: "All right," he called. "Bring him in."

Picking up the lamp, Bill led the way into Robinson's great bedroom at the rear where a coal fire glowed cheerfully in the grate.

"Now then," said Bill, when he'd again put the lamp down and turned to me, "what are you doin' here?"

"What the devil are you?" said I.

"Us?" We're caretakers," he chuckled. "If it's any satisfaction, we're put here to watch out for fellers like you. There's been a lot of liftin' goin' on in these parts."

"But I'm no burglar. I'm Ferguson. That's my camp across the valley."

"Missed it in the dark, I s'pose, eh?" sneered Bill. "I've heard that before, men missin' their own home in the dark an' gettin' into some one else's. Quite a habit nowadays!"

"I didn't miss my house in the dark. I came here for matches," I protested.

"Bill started back in mock surprise.

"No? Do tell!" Then, "That's a new one on me, Jack, this feller jimmyin' his way into a house at midnight, runnin' the risk of bein' shot, an' says he done it for matches."

"At this both laughed loud and long.

"I don't see anything funny in that," said I.

"Naturally," said Bill. "An' you'll keep on not seein' anything funny in it. Just wait."

"Bill's words 'just wait' made me uneasy. 'You've got the drop on me,' I said. 'What are you going to do about it?'

"Take you over to Justice Dyett in the morning. We want him to enjoy the joke. Matches!" he shouted, and Jack responded with hilarious laughter. "Matches!" He stood off, regarding me. "You're a good-lookin' feller. Say, you didn't escape from no sanitarium, did you?"

"Mebbe he's one of them pyromaniacs," suggested Jack, "got matches in his bean."

"And Bill, the comedian, added:

"Quiet now. Don't git excited, sonny! Just wait a little and we'll give you all the matches you want to play with and you can make a great big fire and you can watch it burn, and if it don't burn fast enough we'll give you whole pailfuls of kerosene to throw on it. Think of it! Won't that be lovely?"

I joined in the laughter that followed.

"He ain't no nut," said Jack. "Cause a nut don't laugh when the joke's on him."

"I saw that I had two real human beings to deal with. Said I: "Perhaps I can make you believe me. I'll show you."

"Oh, we'll believe anything you say," said Bill, "after what you told us about matches!"

"Look here!" said I. "I'm John Ferguson. I own that camp over

there. I came up here to get some papers. I found I had no matches. So I came over here.'

"Thinkin' it was easier to find matches in a strange house than in your own?" said Bill. "Gosh, you're gettin' more an' more reasonable as you go on!"

"This isn't a strange house," said I. "Now, I know where there are matches in it. If I'll convince you will you let me go?"

"Nothin' easier than to find matches in a place like this. You might guess they were in a little tin box on the kitchen mantelpiece and hit it every time."

"I get you," said I. "But here's one. In the north of the garret here there's a dormer window, and on the sill I'll show you a small box of matches. That's what I came after."

"After a moment's pause:

"All right. We'll go you'l'"

Bill led the way, holding the smoky lamp aloft. I followed, and Jack brought up the rear of the weird procession. Once in the garret, I went directly to the window indicated. No box of matches there. Silently we filed down to the bedroom again. Bill put the lamp on the table and regarded me for some moments. "Curious bluff," he commented.

"Been out in the cold too long," said Jack.

"Looks funny," said I, "but I'm going to make another bluff. I've got to catch the early train. Come to my camp with me. Bring your lantern. And if I don't find a paper labeled that way—I pulled out a pencil and wrote the title on the back of an envelope—I'll give you a hundred dollars. That'll compensate you for your trouble."

"Supposing you do find that paper, where do we come on?" asked Bill.

"I'll give you the hundred, anyway," said I. "That's all I've got."

"Bill pondered a moment, then:

"Come on, Jack. Let's take him."

"From somewhere downstairs Jack procured a lantern and we started across the valley for my camp. On reaching the house, I took the lantern and began the ransacking of my desk. But the coveted paper was missing. I discovered in a pigeonhole a note in Helen's handwriting: 'All papers relating to this property removed to safety-deposit vault in New York.'

"Bill and Jack stood regarding me quietly.

"You win," said I, and, digging into my pocket, presently handed over the hundred. Thank goodness, I had only a cheap watch with me or they might have demanded that, too.

"We went out on to the porch and I carefully locked the front door.

"That's your way," said Bill, pointing down the road. "Skidoo!"

"When I got about a hundred feet away Jack called after me:

"Say, bo, what are you? A fancy crook or just a nut?"

"Good night, boys!" I called in answer."

"Disgusting, you had to give up that hundred, John," said I, by way of consolation.

"They paid it back," observed John in a most matter-of-fact way.

I was somewhat puzzled.

"Conscience, John?"

"No, exigency, Sam."

"Afraid you'd tell Robinson they'd sold him out?"

"They weren't caretakers—only hobos living up there in those comfortable winter quarters."

"But," I expostulated, "two hobos—paid money back?—Passeth all understanding!"

"Curious alibi," John commented, more to the fire than to me. Then, turning, "It was this way, Sam. Two weeks ago I got word from the Tombs

that a precious pair of suspects wanted to see me. Some one had given them the name of our firm. I went down, and the two proved to be old Bill and Jack. They didn't know me. They'd only seen me in a kind of half light with my hat on and a huge collar turned up about my ears up there in the woods. Very well. They were suspected of having taken part in a burglary in New York the very night they had trimmed me of the hundred at my camp." John chuckled. "Funniest thing, Sam! They confessed to me that they were up in the hills trying to keep comfortable and good, and succeeding in one half the resolution, until a guy came along and they shook him down for a hundred. And that hundred was the means of their downfall, they said. They'd been tempted beyond resistance to visit their old haunts on the Bowery and had been picked up by a couple of headquarters men who were familiar with their peculiar methods which were manifest in the burglary committed.

"Darn it!" said Bill. "We didn't have no chance to spend that hundred!"

"Good!" said I. "That's just my fee. Hand it over." Bill demurred. "I'll be generous," said I. "I'll guarantee to acquit you." And Bill placed in my hand the best part of the hundred I had placed in his hand a fortnight before.

"The same day, when their case was called, I took the stand and—to the amazement of the two crooks—testified that at one o'clock of the very morning the aforesaid burglary was committed in New York I had seen these men in my house up in the Adirondacks, a ten-hour run from the city. The pair were discharged and we walked to the street together. Once outside, old Bill turned to me.

"And you're the feller we shook down for the hundred?"

"Quite so," I admitted.

"For a moment Bill was silent. Then meditatively: 'Well, you got it back. Things go round in a circle, don't they?' Then, with a sigh of affected resignation: 'Verily, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Ain't that so?'" Again John was silent.

"By jingo!" I commented. "By jingo!" Then: "I'm glad you got your money back. Compensated a little for selling your place at a sacrifice."

"Didn't sell at a sacrifice, Sam. Got the biggest price ever paid for that kind of property up there."

For a few moments we three watched the fire, but presently I said:

"What the deuce, John? You cleaned up your affairs, you sold out your house, all to take Helen away and you didn't take her away. What the deuce! I don't understand."

"Wait," said John, lifting a forefinger in his exasperatingly mechanical way. He pondered a bit in the way lawyers have, then: "I told Helen that I had discovered her secret. I told her that I loved her more than ever because of her weakness, that I would devote my life to protecting her against such impulses in the future. Furthermore, Sam, I told her of my terrible experience in the mountains—that night, told her of my terrible anxiety for her and that I had realized what she must have suffered on my account. I told her how that realization had killed my mania for gambling."

And here, I, the psychologist, became deeply interested.

"And how did your words react upon Helen?" I asked.

"Wait. I sought further to comfort her. I told her that I had restored the pieces of jewelry she had taken."

"Restored them?" said I. "How did you know?"

"I found hidden away a little stack of boxes—you know, jewel cases—

with the names of the makers in gilt. I fitted each piece into its own particular nest and, putting the whole lot into my pocket, started out. Each place I visited I told the jeweler that a client of mine had yielded to an unaccountable impulse, had repented, and had begged me to make restitution."

"I suppose Helen was greatly relieved when you told her this?"

"Not so's you'd notice it," said John in a matter-of-fact way.

Thought I: "If that isn't woman all over ag'in! I'm a bachelor, but I fancy I know them." I said sternly: "John Ferguson, I think you're a good deal of a fool. You go through all that and get that money just to take Helen away, and then you flounder all over the lot instead of taking her right away. Now in Heaven's name, why?"

"Wait," said John. "Let Helen tell it. She knows best what's in her own mind."

Helen hesitated, then turned to me frankly.

"I might as well tell you, Sam, right straight out. You can think what you like. I am not what you think—that is, I am not morally guilty. I know you, as a physician, a psychologist, will make allowance. I did get those jewels. I didn't steal them as John

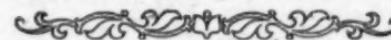
had every reason to believe I had. I purchased them out of a legacy Ann Carrie left me, before I was married, which John didn't know about. I did distribute the trinkets here and there, giving them the appearance of being put out of sight, hidden. I deliberately got the books and turned down the pages. I did all, all with the purpose of leading John to suspect I was a thief. I knew he loved me. I wanted to make him suffer because I knew that, suffering for me, he would forget his mania for gambling. That's all."

For a moment I was silent. "What the deuce, John? Did you know this all the time?"

"Absolutely," John admitted.

"Then why did you call me in? It's a wonderful case, but it's strictly private, a family affair."

Said John: "We wanted to add to your experience a valuable bit. We wanted to show you how a great overshadowing fear, a great anxiety on the part of one for another, may destroy a mania, an obsession, in one's self. And, Sam, we've told you the story this way, kept you in the dark, so that you might feel exactly as we felt, get the reaction as we got it. In that way only, we reckoned, would it be of value to you as a psychological story."



THE PERSUADERS

TWO sprites of me live in your eyes
When face to face we're gazing.
How they assume such pygmy size
Is really quite amazing.
But though they're little, they are strong
With valorous affection.
Your best of judgments owns it wrong
To cast off their protection.
I like to think—when you're asleep
And lids are closed above them,
That softly in your dreams they keep
Persuading you to love them.

CARLYLE F. MACINTYRE.

Venturer's Luck

By Katharine Hill

Author of "The Pearl and the Tecla,"
"The Little Clay Pot," etc.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE glimmer vanished, slanted away on the farther side of an enormous wave. He waited breathless, saw her again farther away, edged his boat toward her, and clutched a sleeve, an arm.

She was unconscious when, with the utmost difficulty, he managed to drag her into the boat. He got her to the cabin's shelter—it was not possible to do more for her now—and gave his mind and strength to the navigation of the launch.

She had not been in the water more than two or three minutes. A block or spar might have struck her, or she might have flooded her lungs. She was sliding, pounding helplessly, as the sea banged them, anguishing to watch while Greg had no choice but to watch. They shipped a wave, and she might have drowned again. Frightened to desperation Greg left the boat to steer itself and went to her, brought her back to fight the storm with his left arm around her, while he cushioned the shocks of their mad progress with his own body. He frowned down at the white face with a ferocious tenderness of protection. With frantic fingers he found her heart under the torn, thin laces and silks. He assured himself of a slow, faint beating.

She had around her neck a string of pearls at which, his eyes drawn there

while he leaned to feel for breath from her chilled lips, he stared with the exaggerated attention often given to irrelevant things in moments of great strain. One or two of the pearls were very big, some were pinkish, one was pear-shaped, the others irregular and small. An odd necklace, and yet, somehow familiar.

The temporary lull which had allowed this brief examination had been only a withdrawal for a stronger onslaught. Happily the key was very near now. There were age-long minutes more of smother, welter, clamor, in which the little engine beat faithfully on, although a great part of the time the propeller kicked in air as the boat leaped, thudded, danced fifty ways at once. Greg's thoughts went on with the struggle, his effort at recollection occupying a section of his mind, while the rest was intent on calculations of how to meet this wave, to avoid the curling crest of the next.

Valerie Morgan! His association with the necklace returned to him suddenly. The necklace was unforgettable, really. He smiled at the wild incongruity of finding again his gift to a child, long since lost sight of, on the throat of his beloved. Valerie Morgan! As he steered Greg pieced the puzzle together, remembered, marveled at her reticence, and asked himself vainly the reason for it.

That little girl! Her identity with "Miss Smith" made the latter strangely moving, detracted from the seductive mystery of the figure, but more than made up for this by the added elements of understanding and appeal. He remembered, of course, sending the pearls to Val. He remembered their walks and talks together, her piteous misunderstanding of his light remark, their disastrous parting.

He had half thought, at the time she gave it, that "Miss Smith" was a name assumed for the moment. Then he had reminded himself what a lot of people really are named Smith.

Here was the key near at hand, its coco palms bent double under the driving-wind, one or two uprooted, gray-green through the veil of rain. A little lagoon opened, a sheet of sheltered water, infinitely desirable, and Greg made for it safely, on nearly the last of his gasoline.

The island was not high, and already the piled waves were beginning to leap the coral arms of the lagoon. But the tide was now full, and the center of the key still several feet above it. Greg splashed waist-deep in water, carried Val—beginning to emerge now from her stupor—through a tangle of sea grape to the shelter of a clump of casuarina trees. She was wet, shivering, and he had, of course, no dry garment to put over her, nor was there any possibility of making a fire with the soaked vegetation of the key. He could only hold her close to his own steaming chest, press against the ground for safety from the furious wind, and hope that the trees would not be uprooted.

The hurricane—for though not of destructive severity here, it was the fringe of a true hurricane—lasted for hours; and for hours, finding them not too long, Greg held her. Twice before he had had the chance to hold her—when she was a child and he had sent her home, and when, less than a month

ago, he had kissed her in the park. She had been his then, he was arrogantly sure, and he had been a mere fool to let her go. Now the hurricane itself could not tear her from his arms.

Val, waking to his face above her, the pressure of his arms, the comforting warmth of his body, gazed with parted lips, supposed herself dreaming, and closed her eyes again. She felt dizzy, feverish, bewildered. Opening her eyes again and again, she still saw Greg, his intent eyes unmistakably solicitous upon her.

"Where did you come from?" she muttered at last, trying to lift her head. "Where am I? What's all that horrible shrieking?"

"It's all right. It can't last much longer. It's the last of a hurricane. We're quite safe here."

"Oh, Reese, Freddy, the yacht! I remember! Where are the others?"

"They're all right," he told her soothingly, hoping that it might be true. "There were two other boats besides the one that idiot made a hole in. D'you know, I think this thing has almost blown itself out? This sun down here will dry you in no time, if it only has a chance."

And, indeed, the heavy gray of the clouds was thinning; the wind was lessening. There was sun at last, flashing, in a radiance which was blinding after the long gloom, over vaporous, blue air, palms, and vegetation which were wetly, shiningly green.

The waves were still gigantic. Indeed, it could only now be seen how high they ran, now foam-streaked, now purple as ink, and now dazzling in whiteness.

Greg stirred reluctantly, rose with her, and walked in the sun which drank the moisture from their wringing clothes, their sodden-hair. Leaving the wet sea grape which rioted everywhere beyond the water line, they sat on the

bared coral, took off their shoes, and felt their chilled feet grow softly warm.

They couldn't possibly be taken off the key for days. Even to-morrow the sea would be too tumultuous for boats to venture. Greg knew that he had not nearly enough gasoline for the return, and nobody on the large islands would have an idea, of course, of where to look for them. He found the outlook satisfactory in the extreme. They would eat coconuts, turtles, and other sea foods; springs were frequent on these islands, and a more romantic, sequestered opportunity for uninterrupted love-making could hardly be imagined.

He began to frame in his mind the first of a series of tender remarks. From a clump of coconut palms on the other side of the lagoon, a figure in draggled clothes, which had been white, emerged, limping.

"What in time! Who's that?" Greg exclaimed.

It was Fred Henderson.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Without actually regretting that young Fred had not been drowned, Greg found it distinctly unfortunate that the waves should have carried him to this particular key.

"Why, it's Freddy!" Val sprang to her feet, throwing up her right arm in signal. At a stumbling run, he came over to them.

"Oh, Val! Oh, thank God, you're safe!"

"What happened to you? Do you know anything about the others? What happened to Reese? I suppose the picture's gone!"

"I didn't see anything. I was in the water, and then I got hold of a life belt. Just felt it floating and managed to get it on. You know there were some on deck for the picture. Getting ashore was the worst, with those big waves. I

thought I was gone. I went to sleep and then came to on the beach. Tell me about yourself, Val."

"Mr. Sherril saved me, and he doesn't know what happened to the others. What a ghastly storm! I didn't know the wind could blow like that. It would have been splendid, if one hadn't been quite so much at its mercy. Mr. Sherril, Fred, do say that Reese and the rest must be safe! There were two boats besides the one we scuttled, and, after all, we three aren't drowned!"

"Of course they're all right," Greg said hastily and reassuringly. "We only got the edge of this thing, and naturally they had a good deal bigger boat than I did."

"Oh, I don't feel half as sure as that! I wish I could!" Fred spoke somberly. "There couldn't be a worse storm than that. I felt as if I must be crazy or dreaming, while I was in the water. Most of the time I couldn't breathe. It was like being tossed in a blanket, only a thousand times more so, and the tops of the waves coming down and hitting me. I'm nearly dead now."

He lay prone on the white coral sand, whose upper layers were already warm and dry again. He found himself in a state-of pitiful collapse, now that the stimulus of knowing that Val was alive was exhausted.

"Think of Mr. Adams and all those poor people. Oh, Lord! They can't have suffered more than I did, anyway. When I was unconscious it would have been just the same, if I'd been dead. My mother and father will be off their heads with worry."

Val put on her shoes moodily, busy with gruesome speculations about the fate of her fellow actors. It would have been nobler to have no thought of self at such a time, but she was not without realization that, if Reese were dead, all her prospects were dead with him, and she was nearly penniless, and jobless, in a foreign country.

Greg touched her shoulder and spoke in a low tone.

"Look here, let that lad rest and come away a little with me; will you? I have fifty things I want to say to you!"

"Oh, if you like!"

She stood up, lifting her tangled, damp hair, which was beginning to curl vehemently as it dried, and shaking it out loosely. The hurricane had not left her a single hairpin. She was unwontedly pale; her face and neck between the dark waves were like alabaster; her eyes were tragically wide. She looked now so much like the child that he had known at Darthurst that Greg wondered how he could have failed to recognize her. But he did not begin with claiming old acquaintance as he had intended; he spoke first of Fred.

"Who is he, anyhow?"

"His name's Frederick Percival Henderson. He's Arnold Henderson's son."

"Haven't I seen him before?"

"Why, yes; you did in New York. He came after us in the street."

"And you made me walk behind. Then he turns up here. Are you engaged to him?"

Val forgot the probable drowning of friends and acquaintances long enough to feel satisfaction at Greg's manner. He was clearly jealous! But she had not spirit enough to exploit this tendency in him. She spoke soothingly.

"No, of course not. It was sheer chance, his being here. But as he was, and I knew him— You know, quite often people are supers in pictures just for the fun of the thing, and so I asked him if he wanted to be in ours."

"And he wanted to, all right!"

"If he'd been drowned, I should never have forgiven myself." She looked over her shoulder to where Fred still lay motionless, his face resting on his crossed arms.

"Well, if you're really not engaged to him, or if you were, I want you to listen to me for a while. We don't

have to have him in our landscape, do we? Let's sit down just beyond the casuarinas; they'll cut him off. He's all right, more frightened than hurt."

Val sat down obediently in the place indicated. As her strength came back—she had eaten a coconut while her clothes dried, and some chocolate which, protected by glazed paper, had not suffered too much in one of Greg's pockets—her appreciation of the catastrophe intensified, and she slipped farther from the mood of unquestioning, dreamlike content in which she had let him hold and warm her. Her nerves began to assert themselves, and she wondered if her head had been aching like this all the time, without her noticing it till now. She wanted to cry, wanted to scream, wanted to be assured that everything was all right, and be able to go to sleep as Fred was so sensibly doing.

"You've been having a sort of joke with me, haven't you?" Greg began. "Val—Val Morgan!"

"How can you talk about jokes?" she said crossly. The utterance of her name, by him who was not supposed to know it, passed unnoticed. "I'm worried to death about those people, everything—"

"They're sure to be all right. Did you ever hear of anything really happening to a moving-picture company? I want to talk about us now. Val, why didn't you tell me who you were?"

"Who I—how did you—of course, I suppose Fred used my name. Why, I hardly thought it would interest you, Mr. Sherrill!"

"Miss Morgan, and that's a thin one! It used to be Greg and Val."

"I suppose it did, yes."

"And it's going to be Greg and Val," he went on, fatuously secure, "to the end of our lives. I, Greg, take thee, Val—only it's the full names, of course, in church. I, Gregory, take thee—is it

Valerie or Valentine? I don't believe I ever knew!"

Her fingers played nervously in the sand.

"Don't be ridiculous!" she said sharply.

"God knows I don't want to be. I'm terribly serious. If you laugh at me, you'll break my heart. Why, I was in love with you in New York, and on my soul I haven't stopped thinking about you since. And I didn't know then you were my little pal grown up. And today I've held you in my arms for hours, and found out that I can't ever let you be anywhere else for very long again. Val, you beautiful, darling child, come closer—"

She jerked her shoulder away from his touch, looked at the sand she was still busily sifting, breathed sharply through parted lips. He was saying all the things she had wanted him to say—the things, in general intention, if less beautifully, that she had put into his mouth in her daydreams, and her head was aching so that she could not appreciate it. She was angrily conscious, too, of a barrier between them, of which he knew nothing.

If Reese were all right, if too many actors and actresses were not drowned, if the picture, after all, was not doomed, then, free of her dragging obligation, she could listen, when her head had stopped hurting.

If they were all drowned—— It was atrocious to care about personal matters in such a case, but she followed the thought painfully, and after a long pause, in which Greg, chagrined and puzzled at her lack of response, looked at her in silence, she asked abruptly:

"How much money have you got?"

"That's a hell of a question," he thought resentfully. Aloud he said, "I can look after a wife, or I wouldn't be asking for one."

"That doesn't mean much. Streetcar conductors, even college professors,

have wives. I want to know, Greg. It's important. It all depends—" She pressed the palm of her hand against her brow wearily. "I remember you used to have plenty of money, without working for it. Could you, for instance, lay your hands on five thousand dollars, right away?"

"Cold cash? No. Not right away I couldn't. Val, what d'you mean by talking money at a moment like this? Can't you have the decency to leave that till later? I haven't even kissed you yet!"

She looked at him miserably.

"You can't kiss me," she repeated obstinately, "if you haven't got that much money."

"I can't, can't I?"

With an ebbing of self-control, he knelt, caught her head between his hands, and kissed her fiercely again and again.

"Can't I? Can't I? You're everything I thought you, then; even if you did use to be a nice, little girl. You're mercenary and heartless and cheap."

His hands sunk in her curling hair; he held her head like a vise, tore kiss after long, rough kiss from pale lips.

"I was right to leave you before. I've been kicking myself for doing it, but I was dead right. Your beautiful body has killed your soul. It's so perfect. And they ought to cut off all this hair and burn it. You're simply hoarding your looks to get some one rich enough to marry you. You couldn't love anybody, could you? I suppose I could marry you, if my rating were good enough, if I generally had a five-thousand-dollar cash balance in the bank, I don't want you!"

He snatched his hands from her with the words, and got up, shaking. Her hair had tangled about his fingers, and the brusque movement hurt her. She gave an angry cry.

"That wood must be dry by now, and the sun's nearly setting," he mut-

tered, recovering himself. "I'll go and make a fire. Where Henderson is, is the best place. You'd better go on over."

He strode away to collect wood for the fire. As he went, with hot, fumbling fingers, he tore some red-gold threads loose which had twined around his hands, and gave them to the wind.

CHAPTER XXV

They slept, uncomfortably, in the circle of the fire's warmth; for night even in the tropics can be chilly to lightly dressed persons without wraps or covers. Each of the three had gloomy thoughts and a gnawing of unsatisfied hunger after the queer food the key provided. The girl felt too much resentment against Greg, he too much against both of them—for he credited Fred with being the object of her mercenary designs—to make any effort at a sporting cheerfulness in the face of misfortune.

Fred hazarded a tentative remark or two which was received in silence or with monosyllables. The waves were thunderous crashes still; their spray, as the tide mounted, flung to hiss on the little fire. The stars, in the night's clearness after the storm, were enormous, blazing. One of Fred's utterances was to the effect that there seemed to be several times as many of them here as at home. Val looked at them and thought how unimportant her small life seemed in their light, remembered that she would not be watching them now but for the silent man on the other side of the fire. He had saved her life, and, unsatisfactory as she found life, she didn't, she realized, in the least wish to die. It was good to feel the fire's warmth, see the stars, listen to the unquiet sea. There were to-morrows, difficulties, anguishing questions. But mere life counted for something.

She woke to a tropic sunrise. The

fire was out, Fred was asleep open-mouthed not far away, Greg was not to be seen, and half a dozen split, green coconuts, with the, bailing tin full of fresh water, were placed near her. She felt stiff, but her headache had gone, and the beauty of the vivid sky, the low, black line of a distant island accenting its color, the turbulent sea, the whole wild adventure of her situation, brought a wave of exultation. The gift of life was more poignantly dear for a vision glimpsed, but not dwelt on, of her body floating as, but for Greg it might have done, in the wrack out there, or found perhaps, before now, by sharks.

She used some of the water to wash, straightened her twisted clothes, combed her hair as well as she could with her fingers and braided it in two heavy plaits. Afterward she breakfasted on the jelly of the coconuts, and contrived a shelter from the sun for Fred, who was justified in sleeping late, since he had taken his turn at watching the fire, as she had not. Still there was no sign of Greg, and she presently went in search of him.

There had been some sort of misunderstanding yesterday, which she had been too exhausted to understand, and he had behaved badly, in a way that she was too ready to forgive. To-day she was herself again; to-day she felt that she need only meet him to set things straight. On this idyllic, lost dot in the Bahaman seas, all consideration of money debts, of moving-picture fiascoes, receded, and what seemed to matter was that Greg should be thanked for having saved her life. She hadn't, she remembered, said a syllable of acknowledgment.

She had an unreasoned persuasion to-day, too, born of rested nerves, light sea breeze, and sunshine, that Reese and the others were somehow all right.

The sea was running high, and she stopped, fascinated, to watch the great

waves curl and crash in a magnificent welter of foam and din. It was useless to call, because of the noise they made. She did not even hear the singing hum of a seaplane which circled in the morning sky, rose, came lower, finally flew, large enough now to be breath-taking, into the quarter—Val was gazing at, dropped again, made, with some skill, the sheltered water of the lagoon and, after a short rush, sat rocking on its floats.

Val ran across the island toward it, abandoning her search for Greg. Fred had sat up, knocking over the shelter of palm leaves which she had made, and was staring stupidly. Yet, of course, a search in seaplanes for the survivors of a party, which all Nassau knew to have gone out yesterday before the storm, should have been the expected, was indeed the inevitable thing. Val hurried to the edge of the sand. Fred, after his minute's sleepy wonder, followed close after her.

In the passenger's seat, very gray-faced and haggard, his full, light eyes more prominent than ever under shrunken, reddish lids, was Arnold Henderson. His look went past Val to the boy, hung there, and his face relaxed. Then he was aware of Val for the first time, and his face became suffused, distorted with anger, as he recognized her.

"So it's you that inveigled my boy into your damned cheap movie idiocies, and nearly got him drowned for me!" he shouted. The words reached her thinly. He clambered out of the plane, waded clumsily the few steps to the shore. The pilot did the same, for it would be necessary to tow his craft to the head of the lagoon before taking the air again, since what wind there was was on this side.

Arnold Henderson marched past Val and gripped his boy's shoulders with a long breath of satisfaction.

"We thought you were drowned—we made sure you were drowned."

"Why, he's—really fond of him!" thought Val, watching the man's ugly, middle-aged, self-forgetful face. A minute later it was her turn for a very different greeting.

He swung to look at her with so much malignant contempt and hate in his glance that, for a moment, she winced away from it. When he addressed her his voice shook with fury, and was thick, coarse, and terrifying.

"As for you, Miss Valerie Morgan, you make a mistake if you think you can defy me like this with impunity. I warned you to keep away from my son, and you follow us down here under an assumed name, take him into this danger. It goes without saying that you'll never see another cent of my money."

"I don't want it, I tell you! And I had no idea Fred was here when I came. I want one thing from you—to know who was brought back from our party. I suppose even you wouldn't be quite so—horrible, if very many of my friends had been drowned yesterday!"

"Yes, father, for God's sake tell us that quick!" Fred burst in.

"Nobody's drowned, as far as I've heard. The missing members of the party were you and this Morgan woman. At least I infer she's the one that calls herself Nadine Wilde. I had a talk with Adams last night; that's how I knew you were with them. He has smashed his leg badly enough to lay him up for months. Serves him right! There've been planes up looking for you since dawn. If that's enough for you, Fred, I wish you'd go and help Parker with his towing. I've got several things to say to this girl that you don't need to hear."

"You treat me like a baby!" Fred retorted resentfully. "You know, I love her, that I haven't had a happy minute since you separated us."

"Since I bought her off, you mean

Get!" He gestured irresistibly, and Fred, downcast, but not daring open rebellion, went slowly away.

"Look here, Mr. Henderson!" Val began quickly, before he could resume. "You're utterly mistaken about what has happened, about me, everything. I had no more idea that you were here than a stranger."

He looked disbelief as insultingly as possible, but she hurried on. "I made a great mistake in taking your money at all; that, of course, is why you've conceived such an opinion of me. And I suppose they told you things about me in Darthurst. But my father was a scholar and a gentleman, and it wouldn't do your Fred any harm to marry me, only that I wouldn't for any part of a split second consider marrying him! And I wouldn't take any more of your money, if I were starving, starving to death. Since I last saw you I've been bending all my energies to repaying what I unfortunately already did take."

He came a step or two closer, eying her intently.

"Do you expect me to believe that?" he demanded.

"Of course I do! It's the truth!"

"Pah!" He struck one balled fist into the palm of the other hand, in a gesture of disgust. "You don't want to repay me. You have no idea of repaying me. It's easy to talk! If you wanted to, you could give me that money, to-morrow! And you have the nerve to stand there and tell me a palpable lie like that, with refutation of it——"

"Hello!"

Greg Sherril emerged suddenly from beyond the casuarinas, stared from the seaplane to the man shouting excitedly at Val, and came to her side at once.

"What's up? You've got a curious manner, whoever you are! Are we trespassing on an island of yours, or what's the answer, anyhow?"

"I don't know you," said Arnold

Henderson. "There's a peculiar position existing between this—young woman, and my family. I don't know that I need to take you into my confidence about it."

"I have a right to demand an explanation of rudeness to Miss Morgan, and I do. Maybe you don't know how very threatening your attitude appeared. You looked just now as if you might be going to hit her in a minute."

"I won't discuss it with you. She knows perfectly well that everything I've said to her has been amply justified. She's just been making lying protestations that simply discredit her further, in view of the most obvious facts. I advise you, young man, to have nothing to do with her."

It was the advice which Greg had been giving himself all night, but, repeated from the truculent lips of this disagreeable intruder, it naturally roused resistance.

"If you were twenty years younger, sir——" he began hotly.

"You'd fight me, no doubt, and afterward find out a little bit more about this young person and be sorry you put yourself out for her. She's an adventuress; that's what she is. My son and I are going now, and you'll have ample time to hear Miss Morgan's explanation of what I have just said."

"Do you mean to say," cried Greg, outraged by this breach of all rules of the sea, even more than by the man's slurs upon Val, "that you propose to go off and leave Miss Morgan here?"

"She is certainly not coming in the seaplane chartered by me! I'll take you off if you like. I have no quarrel with you!"

Greg didn't answer that. His lips compressed; he watched Arnold Henderson walk away, watched him check Fred, who wished to have speech with Val again, watch the seaplane, its passengers aboard, head into the wind and take off.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

When Val and he were alone again upon the key, and the seaplane distinguishable from a bird on the wing only by the level steadiness of its flight, Greg's eyes left it and came back to rest steadily, searchingly on Val.

"I'd like to murder him!" cried the girl with savagery. Her eyes were all pupil; the hands with which she was mechanically rebraiding the end of her hair were tremulous.

"Fred or the pilot will tell where we are, if he won't. Some one will come back for us soon," Greg said reassuringly. "Perhaps you might care to let me in on this, a little, in the meantime. I don't believe anything he said, of course. A man like that ought not to be allowed to live. Perhaps I might murder him for you. Who is he, anyhow? I gather he's our young friend's father, but there's something familiar, too, about his unprepossessing face, and it's not a resemblance to the boy."

"You've seen pictures of him. He's Arnold Henderson, one of the big business gods that direct our national destinies.

"We've nothing better to do, and it may be some time before anybody comes for us, so I'll tell you everything if you'd like to sit down and listen. I'll tell you why he thought he could talk to me like that, and why I wanted five thousand dollars."

Because Greg had seen for himself the surroundings of her childhood, he understood, as another man might not have understood, the story which Val had to tell him. He understood the paradox of that shameless acceptance of the money by a girl whose instincts he knew to be naturally simple, honorable, and sportsmanlike. She could not tell him, but he divined without telling, how she had taken the transaction with a childish lack of scrutiny, as one of those mysterious settlements of older

people which, since it touched money merely and left the conduct of her own life to her, was not worth attention. Val's emphasis was not on her excuses, but on the enormity of the thing done, the necessity of undoing it at the earliest possible moment.

"I ought to have taken you away with me that time when you were all ready to go," he muttered. "You'd have been looked after better than you have been, anyhow."

"Oh, why didn't you!" she cried, with a flare of passion. "I haven't forgiven you yet for sending me back. I never shall forgive you!"

"Why, *Val!*" He stared at her, bringing his face close to hers. "D'you mean that? We could do it yet, you know."

"Don't you see that I'm choking until I repay that man? You haven't the money. I asked you yesterday. And with Reese laid up, it may be for months. And, of course, the films yesterday were lost. Heaven only knows when the picture can be finished! It will be forever before I get hold of the money through Reese! What do you suppose he meant by saying I could pay him, if I wanted to? If I want to! Don't I want to? Can you imagine what he meant, Greg?"

"He meant these." Greg extended a forefinger and lightly touched his old gift on her neck.

"He has probably bought a lot of such things for his wife and can see with half an eye that these are quite valuable."

"*Real?* Gregory Sherril, what do you mean? My ratty, little, old string of pearls—*real?*"

She unclasped them, stretched them under her eyes, frowned down at them in perplexity and disbelief.

"I ought to know, oughtn't I? I pried each one of 'em from its parent oyster with these fair hands, and it's a nasty job, too, take it from me. That

big, pink fellow alone is worth the sum you want. Of course, he's worth most of the others together, too."

"But people don't go around conferring fortunes on little girls they've once chummed with. You're—stringing me. Greg, please don't. This is too horribly serious for me!"

But his voice and eyes were matter-of-fact, convincing, as he went on.

"When I sent them I thought I was going to be so rich that these would look like a handful of chicken feed. I'd found a pearl lagoon by a sort of accident, my own discovery, worked it for a week, and then had to put back to port for supplies of one kind and another. It was unbelievably rich; the pearls I strung for you weren't one tenth of that first haul even. The others were stolen, and I had no chance to try to get them back. When I got back to civilization I found the war was going on worse than ever, and we in it, so I chucked the pearls for the time being and came home to join up, and got stuck in Russia. When I went back I found my lagoon all gummed up as a British government preserve."

"But *Greg!*" she gasped. "How simply dreadful! You might have been a millionaire!"

He looked at her with some bitterness.

"I might have aspired to marry you, mightn't I? If I'd only known, pushed my luck—No!" he said violently. "I'm not sorry about the damned thing. The South Pacific's full of chances. I can turn over all the money I'll ever need, unless it's to buy a luxury like you. That's too expensive and better done without. I have a thing in mind now; trying to raise the wind for it is what I was in New York for, and it may go through yet."

Val looked at him curiously.

"I don't want to be plastered with money," he repeated. "I want a little uncertainty in my life, a prize to play

for. Being as rich as all that would be like playing bridge with all the honors of all the suits in your hand every time. Going grand slam might be fun for a time or two, but before long I should be ready to stop playing."

"So should I," she said dreamily.

"You?"

"I was ever so rich last winter, and it was great fun at first, but I was beginning to get tired of it even before I found I'd spent all the money. You're all wrong about me, Greg, about my being an expensive luxury, and all that. If anybody's had experience in keeping house cheaply, it's I. I shouldn't make at all a bad wife for a poor man."

"Here, wait a minute," he interrupted, excitedly. "Let's get this thing straight! Have I been misjudging you all along? Val, do you mean that you don't demand vaults of money for yourself, once you've repaid this brute? Aren't figuring on how much your looks will bring you?"

"Why—*Greg!*"

"Then there could be a chance for me after all?"

"A chance!" she cried indignantly. "There's never been a chance for anybody else. I've thrown myself at your head! I've taken things from you that I'd have had the head off anybody else for! You pulled out half my hair yesterday, and—"

"Val, would you be willing to knock about the world, cut off from department stores and doctors and telephones for months at a time, maybe years, have no society except chance people you might run into, mostly impossible, never have an excuse to wear an evening dress, or—no, of course you wouldn't! A man hasn't the right to ask it of any girl. You see, when I found out yesterday who you were, and remembered how crazy you were when you were a flapper for just that sort of a life I sort of forgot then how you had grown up,

changed necessarily, tasted blood in the way of admiration and society."

She was smiling cryptically.

"But what about you, Greg? Would you give up your sort of life for me?"

"I'm just like all the others, Val, I'm taking the count. I'll work for you and get you everything you need, and go up and down in that devil's contrivance of a subway, and I'll be deliriously happy all the time because I've got you in our particular string of cubby-holes on the upper West Side. If you love me, Val, if you love me——"

"There, you're doing it again! Making me think I'm invited to go on your travels with you, and then trying to crawl out of it after I have my trunks

packed! Yes, figuratively, I had my trunks packed, though, of course, I must finish the picture for Reese if he wants me to."

"Val, break this gently. Do you mean that you *don't* demand an apartment in New York, and doctors and dress-makers and taxicabs? You'll come bumming around the world with me? I'm to have you, and—everything else, too?"

"Why, Greg, I've been dreaming of it ever since you asked me, and reneged, seven long years ago! Are you going to renege this time?"

"Don't worry!" he told her, after a long kiss. "You're never going to get rid of me again!"

THE END.



THE PHILOSOPHER

AND what are you, that wanting you,
I should be kept awake
As many nights as there are days
With weeping, for your sake?

And what are you, that, missing you,
As many days as crawl,
I should be listening to the wind
And looking at the wall?

I know a man that's a braver man,
And twenty men as kind,
And what are you, that you should be
The one man in my mind?

(Yet women's ways are witless ways,
As any sage will tell;
And what am I, that I should love
So wisely and so well?)

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY.



In Broadway Playhouses

By Dorothy Parker

Comedy Relief

OF course, it is only natural for people to disagree as to which is the best of the long list of comedies which start the season off right, on account of this being a fairly free country and every one being entitled to his own opinion. But there cannot be so much as a rustle of dissent when the award is made to the sweetest of the lot. The burnt-wood tie rack goes, with the best wishes of one and all, to Mr. Roi Cooper Megrue for his "Honors Are Even." You couldn't find a sweeter, cleaner, more wholesome little comedy in all this great, big, bustling city. No, nor a duller one.

Now and then, if you watch closely, you see marks which lead you to believe that this Mr. Megrue is none other than the one who wrote "Tea for Three." There is a sudden spurt in the first act—not at the beginning, but along around the time when the theater parties clatter gayly in. And by the time the young people have romped over you and settled themselves cozily for an evening's fun, things on the stage have gone from fair to worse, and Miss Lola Fisher may be heard telling Mr. William Courtenay that sometimes she wonders where we come from, and where we will go to, and what life is all about, anyway.

Maybe it is that Mr. Megrue is showing us that he has his serious side, too.

In between such flashes of fun as an elderly maidservant who has a severe headache from drinking too much champagne, and a buoyant juvenile who tells his newly acquired fiancée that he "hasn't been so happy since the day he stroked the winning crew at Poughkeepsie"—in between these come the heart throbs. There is a great deal about mothers—oh, a great deal! You gather, indeed, that mothers have Mr. Megrue on their side. He as much as says, right out, that they are a great institution. "I hate," says Mr. Megrue's hero—as much through his teeth as careful enunciation will permit—"I hate these dirty plays that make fun of motherhood." It is a disappointment that he does not specify the dramas that he had in mind. Far be it from our humble Corona to convey the impression that the stage is one bit better than it should be, but we have been attending the theater for twenty years, man and boy, and we have yet to behold the opus wherein a mean crack is taken at motherhood.

Then, there is the heroine's above-mentioned whimsical wondering as to what this life of ours is all about, anyway, which brings on the stalwart hero's recital of his creed—not to worry, but just to work hard and be happy. There is the hero's speech—you can recite it with him—about "you are like a little

flower that naturally turns to the sun," and the heroine's whimsical rejoinder—she is the most determinedly whimsical heroine you ever saw in your life—about "the little flower that thought it was turning to the sun, but found it was only an electric light." And there is the sweetest of sweet endings, with the lovers kissing snrilly into the telephone, to show the hero's mother, who is supposedly at the other end of the wire, how things are going with them.

By all means, put "Honors Are Even" down on your list of plays to be seen. It will be just the thing to take Aunt Bertha to when she comes down from up-State to spend the holidays.

That the kindly producers think not only of those who care for sweet plays is shown by the production of "Getting Gertie's Garter." There might be something in putting "Honors Are Even" and "Getting Gertie's Garter" together, under the heading "Sweet and Low," but, as you can see, it would be scarcely worth the effort. "Getting Gertie's Garter" is by Wilson Collison and Avery Hopwood, whose combined efforts resulted in the gift to the world of "Ladies' Night." It is distinctly not a bedroom farce; the big scene takes place in a haymow. Novelty—that's what the public wants.

There is little use in retailing the plot of "Getting Gertie's Garter," even if one could keep track of it. The title is, in itself, a complete scenario. The quest for the garter involves several badly confused sets of married couples, a comedy butler, a French maid, and a generous assortment of lines at which large ladies in the audience laugh hysterically and nudge their companions viciously. It is a curious thing that the Messrs. Collison and Hopwood will go as far as it is humanly possible, within the limits of the English language, to get a questionable line, but that they will permit no mention of the human

leg, nor of the accouterments worn thereon. They do not even allow themselves the use of the word "limb," preferring some much more circuitous reference, while the garter is described as "something a girl must use to keep up her—er—appearances." What do you make of this, my dear Freud?

Hazel Dawn—the crusade to seek her chemise provided the plot of "Up in Mabel's Room"—is the lady of the garter, and the comic butler is done by Walter Jones. Clever impersonations are given by Lorin Raker, who imitates Ernest Truex throughout the play, and by Dorothy Mackaye, who imitates the imitators of Madge Kennedy, and throws in an effective dash of May Vokes for good measure. This young comédienne made a great hit with the audience; indeed, it seemed as if there was only one member of it—ourselves, if names must be mentioned—who felt that Miss Mackaye's best moments were those when she was off stage. It is discouraging to report that, despite the heroic work of its cast and the labors of its authors, "Getting Gertie's Garter" remains far less depraved than those who have its success at heart could wish.

"The Teaser" also required the services of two people in its writing—Martha Stanley and Adelaide Matthews, who wrote "Nightie Night" a few seasons ago. It is a decidedly entertaining little comedy—nothing so original that it need cause you any amazement, but markedly pleasant, nevertheless. The plot works around a flapper from the country who comes to New York to live with her aunt and messes things up most efficiently. The comedy takes a turn for the worse in the third act, where the flapper goes to a married man's apartment for supper, which, of course, includes champagne and is served by a Japanese butler, who gets a big laugh by introducing the word "hell" into his remarks.—Then, the

aunt comes to the apartment to rescue her niece, and the niece runs and hides in the married man's bedroom to avoid her aunt, and, just then, when the married man is alone in the library with the aunt, who should come in—but the married man's wife, and—But there, you could have told me yourself. Anyway, still another act sees that everything is fixed up, with both the aunt and the niece getting husbands, and the married man's wife listening to reason and being friends with him again. And so you are free to go home, after a decidedly easy two hours or so.

The authors owe hearty thanks to Jane Gray, who plays the aunt, John Cromwell, who is the married man, and Faire Binney, who is the niece. Mr. William A. Brady, who produced the piece, reveals a vein of pretty sentiment, and at the same time gets in a clever stroke of advertising by causing a large portrait of Grace George, his wife, to be hung on the wall of the setting showing the aunt's apartment.

Among the lot of honest-to-goodness comedies has appeared one musical offering, "Tangerine" by name, which stars Julia Sanderson. The musical part of the entertainment is not so much, save for various old songs rendered by a quartet, and a song called "Sweet Lady," done by Miss Sanderson and Frank Crumit. The comedy part is long and laborious, and is somehow mixed up with an island in the South Seas—"Tangerine" is the name of the island; now do you see?—where the women do all the work. You can imagine just how much material for fun that provides, and the authors get about four times as much as you can imagine out of it. This is done by the simple and direct method of repetition.

The most notable feature of the show is the opportunity it provides for Allen Kearns and his partner, Becky Cauble, to get in some songs and dances. I don't know just what it is

about Mr. Kearns—his singing is not anything to speak of; though he dances well, he doesn't dance so very remarkably; and he says his lines without particular distinction. Maybe it is that he does not seem to think he is so extremely good, as most musical-comedy juveniles do. Maybe it is his seeming willingness to please, and his apparent hope that you will be good enough to like him. Or maybe it is just that he wears normal clothes, and doesn't express his individuality by means of sharpened lapels, coats with empire waistlines, and vertical pockets. Whatever it is about him, it is Allen Kearns who is responsible for making you think that "Tangerine" is an above-the-average musical comedy.

For there really is nothing extraordinary about it save the work of its lyricist. Of course, he works in the conventional "mine" and "find," and such commonplace rhymes, but where he rises to really great heights is by rhyming "listen" and "wishing." And he transcends even this by rhyming "lingerie" with "hay." One can but admire the spirit which will take a chance on rhyming "lingerie" with "hay." Great courage is always to be honored. But where the heart quails is at the "find" and "mine," the "home" and "own," that have come to be taken by Broadway as perfect rhymes, and are used with the casualness of perfect confidence in their correctness. There are times when one thinks seriously of renouncing one's citizenship, and going to live in Tahiti to try and forget.

It is such things as these rhymes and their creators that make one more than thankful that there are people still left in the world like George Kaufman and Marc Connally and Franklin P. Adams, who are responsible for "Dulcy," recently come to life at the Fraze. It was in Mr. Adams' column in the *New York Tribune* that Dulcy, the lady of the bromides, first appeared, and that

was as much as he had to do with the comedy. Mr. Connelly and Mr. Kaufman went on with it from there.

One wonders, really, how they ever had the nerve to do it.

One beholds *Dulcy* on the stage, and hears her running on about how she doesn't play bridge—she plays at it; how to be lucky at cards means to be unlucky at love; how one should always count ten before replying, when angry; how she's not good for anything until she has had her cup of coffee in the morning; how books are her best friends, she always says; and all the rest of them. And one thinks of those ladies, the backbone of the nation and the vertebral of the box office, who throng the theater at matinées, and bring their husbands with them to evening performances—those ladies who speak entirely in *Dulcy's* phrases, and see nothing whatever the matter with them. And again one wonders admiringly how the authors had the nerve to think that their audiences would make the grade.

The funny thing is, audiences love it. But don't let this revive your faith in human nature to any great extent. It is not on account of the gorgeousness of *Dulcy* herself; it is because the authors have provided a plot concerning her, so that those of pronounced dumb-bell tendencies in the audience are able, though they miss her point entirely, to laugh at the way she mixes things up by her well-meant interfering. Thus have Mr. Connelly and Mr. Kaufman fixed it so that practically every member of the American public can have a good time at their little party.

The plot is adroitly made, and moves with a workmanlike neatness. But it isn't the plot; after all, there are quite a few persons who can work out nice, tricky plots, and make everything come out all pretty and even. The heaven-sent things about "*Dulcy*" are the scene in which the heroine persuades one of her guests to perform a singularly tune-

less selection on the piano, and occupies herself in noisily quieting the listeners, offering them candy in piercing whispers, and, at a chord shortly before the conclusion, applauding brightly, under the impression that it is all over; the scene where a scenario writer tells the plot of his latest superpicture, "Sin," during which recital the curtain is lowered to indicate the passing of half an hour, and rises to reveal him still passionately relating; the too brief glimpse of *Dulcy* at the bridge table; an advertising man's talk about his work—in short, all the interludes between the march of the plot. These are the things which make one thankful that one did not pass on into the great beyond before "*Dulcy*" came, to make it worth while sticking along down here.

Lynn Fontanne, as the heroine, is a complete photograph of all the *Dulcies* you have ever known in your life. She is wholly perfect—the irritatingly soothing laugh, the nervous teetering—everything is there. Her costumes are exactly *Dulcy's* choice; everything is just a little more than it absolutely has to be. *Dulcy* would pin a crimson rose on her shoulder, where it vies bravely with the coral dress and the sash which is just the right shade too bright; *Dulcy* would wear a collection of noisy bangles, which clank cheerily in every hush. You wouldn't believe, until you saw it happen, that *Dulcy* could come to life so startlingly.

The rest of the cast are as photographic, particularly Howard Lindsay as the moving-picture writer—I believe the correct title is "scenarist"—and Elliott Nugent as the advertising man. I have no doubt that Gregory Kelly was perfectly corking as *Dulcy's* young brother. I could hear nothing he said, a difficulty which those of us sitting back of the second row shared among us. But he gave every appearance of being simply great in the part.

It was indeed a big week that

brought both "Dulcy" and "March Hares" to town. It makes it rather hard to keep from going about thinking that things can't be so bad, after all. And what kind of attitude is that for a reviewer to assume?

"March Hares" is by Harry Wagstaff Gribble, whose play, "The Outrageous Mrs. Palmer," had a short run hereabouts last season. Perhaps it is for old sake's sake that the producers have used in "March Hares" some of the scenery which figured in "The Outrageous Mrs. Palmer." And a pretty idea, too. It is going to be rather difficult to give any inside information about "March Hares," for there is, ever present, the fear that you might not like it. Many people did not. If you are a person of sterling qualities, chief among which are sound good sense and a wholesale intolerance of the impractical, you would have the worst evening of your life at the Bijou Theater.

But if your soul yearns for a superb display of insanity, "March Hares" is for you. It is a magnificently mad comedy of four overtemperamental people, who talk with great positiveness and brilliant sophistication about nothing in particular, and get themselves worked up to a state of frenzy every few minutes over almost imperceptible matters. After years of ponderous plays dealing with vital questions after all their vitality has been removed by the author; after seasons of trick comedies, wherein every one does just as expected, and it all turns out happily, as there is no reason why it shouldn't; after aeons of plays turned out according to the good old formula that never goes wrong; then one comes on "March Hares," which blithely knocks the conventions for a goal, and all is well once more. After all, there must be a heaven.

Now and then, the author has met the box office halfway and introduced farcical situations into his comedy, so that the audience may have the pleas-

ure of renewing acquaintance with old friends, as you might say. But his concessions are few; the play is almost entirely given over to being gloriously nonsensical.

It is gorgeously done by Alexander Onslow, Adrienne Morrison, Norma Mitchell, Brandon Peters, and Lucile Watson. Miss Watson, in the rôle of a gentle, old mother, is completely bewildered by the goings on of the highly strung ones about her, but sweetly tolerant of them, only desiring to see the young people have a good time. You can't imagine Miss Watson in a part like that until you see her. And then you don't see how they are ever going to let her play anything else.

"March Hares" may or may not be a hit. One can only pray that in these sordid times there are still enough persons left to lend madness the support it deserves. We can only thank Mr. Gribble for a wholly glorious evening, and state, in return for his kindness, that if he ever needs the services of an upstairs girl, or a mother's helper, or a visiting waitress, we are at his disposal at any time.

Well, and now that "Dulcy" and "March Hares" have received their silver-gilt stars, little remains but the awarding of further raspberries. Will "Sonny Boy," "Sonya," and "The Mimic World of 1921" step right up, please, and pass out with as little jostling as possible?

"Sonny Boy" was originally known to its friends as "Sonny," but shortly after its opening had its name changed. The reason for this daring innovation, according to the press notices, was that "Sonya" was playing just across the way, and people were going about getting the two titles all mixed up. You can just imagine what a state of affairs that was.

Once you had seen "Sonny," though, there was little danger of your ever con-

fusing it with anything else. It had a dash of everything—tears, wholesome laughter, Emma Dunn, war stuff, a quartet, good old buddies, a former Winter Garden artiste, and several parlor songs. It would have been no surprise if at any minute the management had introduced an ice ballet, or a troupe of whirling Bedouins. And, I think, myself, it would have been an awfully nice idea. It would have warded off the plot for that much-longer.

For there are thick clots of plot, supplied by the obliging Mr. George V. Hobart. It starts off with a soldier dying overseas, who gets his friend—his buddy, as they never said in the army—to go back home and impersonate him, so that his blind mother need never know. The two soldiers look alike, oddly enough, seeing that they are both played by Ernest Glendinning. So convincingly does this buddy impersonate his friend that all the home folks are fooled—save the blind mother, which, you know yourself, is not a bad idea. But from there the author really gets into his stride. What do you think? It seems that the mother had had two sons, but, years before, one had been in a shipwreck and was supposedly

lost. However, he had really managed to reach shore, and was there brought up by a wolf or something, and so Ernest Glendinning turns out to be Emma Dunn's son after all! Isn't it a small world?

"Sonya" was translated from the Polish, but why is not brought out. It is one of those things about a young king in Merry Widow uniform, and the little dancer from the opera. The bolshevist trend of modern art is exemplified by having the king marry the girl in the end. However, he keeps his throne, thereby satisfying the conservative element in the audience. Violet Heming and Otto Kruger in the leading rôles help to make "Sonya" one of the cleanest, prettiest, most tiresome little plays you ever saw in your life.

"The Mimic World of 1921" is on the roof of the Century Theater, but it is not a midnight show, neither do the clients sit around at tables. The place is now transformed into a neat little theater, although you can still dine on the charming balcony overlooking the Park. And it is only kind to suggest that you hurry through dinner, so as to be safely home before the show starts.



THE DEPARTING GUEST

SCORNING my hospitality,
Was it youth that fled from me?
A blind moth smote the window sash;
The fire fell into sudden ash;
I heard a creaking down the floor,
I heard the shutting of a door.
I caught a tread of passing feet,
Yet saw no one go down the street.
Was it youth who stole away?
My happy guest but yesterday!

HARRY KEMP.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

ARE you superstitious? Does the doing of certain things augur evil undoubtedly to follow? Would the shattering of your hand mirror mean the shattering also of your hopes for a definite round of years? Would you risk the mêlée of traffic wheels to avoid passing near or under a ladder? Or are you just one of the army of people who, in nowise superstitious, yet prefer to avoid thirteenth chairs, third lights on cigarettes, and all the other little commonplaces which the wise or otherwise tell us wreck or definitely cut short our little strut upon the stage?

SUPPOSE loving a certain woman meant sure death to the lover? Suppose you had seen man after man of your acquaintance die after he had worshiped the charms of one fascinating woman? Suppose, then, you felt yourself succumbing to her irresistible lure—and more, felt reasonably sure that she held a kind of affection for you? Would you feel one whit deterred by the fear of the fate which might await you? Or, confident in the sincere quality of your own love, would you defy all superstition, apparently proved?

CHARLES SAXBY, in collaboration with Richard L. Masten, has written for AINSLEE'S the most powerful novelette of his career. It is called "Roses of Penance," and from the first page it is a grippingly romantic tale. No man who had ever loved Rosita lived for long. Her very charms seemed to cast a blight on the most stalwart suitor. Yet Cavan dared openly to love her. His fate thereafter will leave you breathless as you follow it. Watch for "Roses of Penance" in the December AINSLEE'S. It is the kind of novelette which it is given few authors to achieve and few magazines to acquire for its readers. And you get all of it, complete, in one issue.

IN contrast to superstition, do you on the other hand, believe in luck? We hear such platitudes as "lucky at cards, unlucky in love," arguing that a kind of happy success crowns every effort of certain people, while the reverse is true of certain others. Do you believe it? Or, do you stolidly maintain here again that what is called luck is but the working out of cause and effect, the inevitable result of a certain definite previous line of action?

DRUSILLA'S heart affairs had a way of taking a lucky turn. So people thought. But few knew the agony of soul, the menu calculations which went into the manufacture of that luck. One of the cleverest conceptions of this always clever young authoress is "Fisherman's Luck," by Winston Bowe, which she has just finished for the December AINSLEE'S.

THE hundreds of letters which we receive daily lead us to believe that AINSLEE'S readers like best the really stirring tales—those that contain the conflict which is life at its most real. And, just as in life itself, the typical AINSLEE'S tale on which the magazine has built its unique reputation, has in it always the leaven of love. Just such a tale is Clinton Dangerfield's "The Cup of Comprehension."

WOULD you sacrifice your own comfortable position in society for the sake of shielding another woman's honor? Especially, if maintaining that woman's honor meant losing your own husband? The present political independence of women touches closely the domestic shrine, and is bound to make for heart-severing complications in some cases. Particularly, when woman is, as she always will be, wife and mother first voter after. If you are the domestic type, "The Cup of Comprehension" is for you. If you are that more modern type of public woman, "The Cup of Comprehension" is for you. The author has put into it a fine complement of the feminine tone of mind in all its manifestations. Your own point of view is somewhere represented in this forceful tale. Don't miss it.

GERTRUDE BROOKE HAMILTON, one of AINSLEE'S favorite authors, has in the December number, a characteristically sprightly tale called "A Maid of All Play." Vital in its theme, thoroughly human in its treatment, it is a story you'll remember.

FOR the December issue, also, James Francis Dwyer has written a gripping shorter tale called "Just My Little Girl," which, primarily a real story, is, further, that rare combination of pathos and humor, of affluence and of crying poverty of soul, which is typical of life the world over. For a real-life narrative read "Just My Little Girl" in the December number.

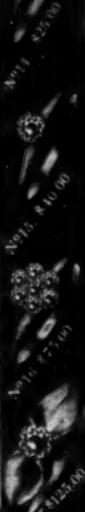


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Present Position.....

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Beware! Unless you see the name "Bayer" on package or on tablets you are not getting genuine Aspirin prescribed by physicians for twenty-one years and proved safe by millions. Take Aspirin only as told in the Bayer package for Colds, Headache, Neuralgia, Rheumatism, Earache, Toothache, Lumbago, and for Pain. Handy tin boxes of twelve Bayer Tablets of Aspirin cost few cents. Druggists also sell larger packages. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticacidester of Salicylicacid.



Bud Cigarettes

Plain or Cork Tip. Made of selected Pure Turkish Tobacco, with a distinctive blend which is appreciated by smokers of discrimination and taste. 100 Bud Cigarettes securely packed in Mahogany Wood Boxes. Send us \$2.00 for a box of 100. Sent postpaid to any address. The Bud Cigarette Company, 2 Rector Street, New York City.

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DARKNESS is their stock in trade. They work by stealth—unheard and unseen—their movements cloaked in secrecy. It's honest folks that seek the light. They are the only ones who can risk it.

It's the same way in business. The manufacturer who is not sure of his goods does not dare to advertise. Advertising would hasten the end of his business career—put him to a test he could not meet.

The manufacturer who advertises, deliberately invites your inspection. He tells you about his product and then lets it stand on its own merits. You can depend on him. *No one knows his product is good.*

That's one reason why it pays you to read the advertisements. It is through advertising that you are able to keep in touch with the good things that progressive business men are spending their money to introduce and to keep before you.

Advertisements are interesting, instructive and profitable. They throw a powerful light on the very things that concern you most. Read them.

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This blue white perfectly cut diamond, 7/8 - 5/32 ct. at \$62.50 among bargains last list. Many other big values in our lists. Buy HERE. Loans are made, not marine. This 25 year old diamond banking firm has thousands unpaid loans and other bargains we must sell NOW.

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are different from the truss, being adhesive applicators made self-adhesive so as to securely hold the distended muscles securely in place. No straps, buckles or spring effects—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the public bone. These bands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most contumacious cases conquered.

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What Is Love?

A cynical cynic heard of LOVE STORY MAGAZINE and straightway wrote to us: "What are you going to publish in it? What is a love story? What is love?"

Hard question? Yes, because love itself can never be really defined. It has so many elements that render it complex—but we know that it exists and that it is the greatest thing in the world.

Have you ever seen the sun's rays broken into their ingredient colors when passing through a glass prism? Beautiful? Most certainly.

So it is with love. Pass it through the prism of everyday life and it readily dissolves into component parts. Then what do we find? Patience? Yes! Self-denial? Yes! Kindness? Yes! Humility? Yes! Courtesy? Yes! Good nature? Yes! Charity? Yes! Sincerity? Yes!

Well, then, is not love beautiful? Are not the lover and the loved most fascinating? Hence, it seems to us that LOVE STORY MAGAZINE fills a real need. It is just what its name implies. It is not just another of the sordid publications which pander to the passions; it is clean and honest in its purpose to make your life brighter and happier—to tell you of love.

Will you give it an opportunity to do so?

Semimonthly - - - 15c the copy

**STREET & SMITH CORPORATION
NEW YORK**



Notable among current musical announcements is that Florence Easton, soprano, Metropolitan Opera Company, now records exclusively for Brunswick. Her initial record (just released) is the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria."

Soprano High "C" Without "Metallic" Suggestion

*A Brunswick Achievement Vouched
For By Highest Musical Authorities*

Musicians, critics, teachers, all will tell you the severe test of a phonograph is in rendering "high notes," especially *soprano*.

Remember this when buying a phonograph, and insist that soprano records be played.

Note, then, how most instruments vibrate, sound "metallic" when the higher notes are reached.

Then hear the same records on The Brunswick.

Hear the full range of "high notes." Soprano High "C" in ringing intensity, without slightest "metallic" intrusion—clear-toned, vibrationless! And you will marvel at difference so great in phonographs.

Exclusive methods the reason

By means of exclusive methods of Reproduction and of Interpretation, Brunswick achieves perfect rendition of the so-called "difficult" tones—the piano, the harp, the human voice. Methods which apply to no other phonographs or records.

The Brunswick Method of Reproduction is exclusively Brunswick. The Brunswick Method of Interpretation, in producing records, has not been successfully imitated.

Hence, buying any phonograph without at least hearing The Brunswick is a mistake. And to be without Brunswick Records is to be without what is best in music.

Ask your nearest Brunswick dealer for a demonstration. The Brunswick plays all records, and Brunswick Records can be played on any phonograph. Hear, compare—they judge for yourself.

THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER CO., Chicago
Manufacturers—Established 1845

BRUNSWICK
PHONOGRAFS AND RECORDS

Note: New Brunswick Records are on advance sale at all Brunswick dealers on the 10th of each month in the East, and in Denver and the West on the 20th.



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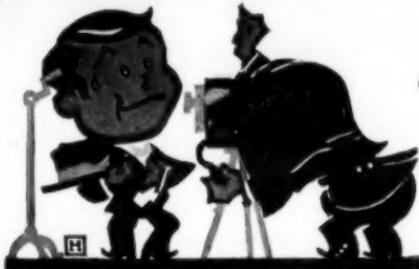
Hear These
Brunswick
Super-Feature
Records

Each month Brunswick releases from three to six Super-Feature records—the best phonographic music of the month. The current release presents three Metropolitan Opera Company's stars, two of whom, Florence Easton and Giuseppe Di Pravenna, make their debut as exclusive Brunswick artists on these records. A notable release.

1921—*Ave Maria* (Bach-Gounod). Florence Easton
1921—*Di Provenza Il mar* (Vendi's "Traviata," Act II, Scene 1). Giuseppe Di Pravenna
1921—*Dreams of Long Ago* (Carroll-Caruso). Mario Chamlee
Note:—The above records are on sale at all Brunswick dealers in conveniently packed envelopes of three—price \$1.00. Or four, if desired. Hear them by all means.

Any phonograph can play Brunswick Records

With acknowledgments to K. C.



"I smiled- and he shot me."

AFTER MONTHS and months.
MY WIFE persuaded me.
TO HAVE it done.
SO I went around.
TO THE photographer.
AND GOT mugged.
WHEN THE pictures came.
I SHOWED them to a gang.
OF AMATEUR art critics.
AND PROFESSIONAL crabs.
DISGUISED AS friends.
WHO FAVORED me.
WITH SUCH remarks as.
"DOESN'T HE look natural?"
"HAS IT got a tail?"
"A GREAT resemblance."
AND THAT last one.
MADE ME sore.
SO WHEN friend wife.
ADDED HER howl.
I TRIED again.
THIS TIME they were great.

FOR HERE'S what happened.
THE PHOTOGRAPHER said.
"LOOK THIS way, please."
AND HELD up something.
AS HE pushed the button.
AND NO one could help.
BUT LOOK pleasant.
FOR WHAT he held up.
WAS A nice full pack.
OF THE cigarettes.
THAT SATISFY.



LIGHT up a Chesterfield and sense the goodness of those fine Turkish and Domestic tobaccos in that wonderful Chesterfield blend. Taste that flavor! Sniff that aroma! You'll register "They Satisfy." You can't help it.

They Satisfy **Chesterfield**
CIGARETTES

LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO COMPANY